Legends Unleashed:

18 Days of Valour

The Complete battle of Kurukshetra

A comprehensive narrative

By Pandit Jagannath

18 Days of Valour The Complete battle of Kurukshetra in a easy to read and understand format

Volume 1

Printed 2023

Compiled by Pandit Jagannath

Designed by www.VedicSight.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

wish to dedicate this book to my son Bhima

I wish to thank my Father and mother who introduced me to the Vedic world view

I wish thank my spiritual teachers and Inspirations

Veda Vyas who gave us the vast ocean of vedic knowledge,

Vishvamitra who always inspires me to be my best and take joy in the performance of austerities and spiritual practices.

Madhvacarya who has given us the divine philosophy of Truth and brings us the bliss of the concept of Satyam Jagat,

Srila Prabupada my fathers guru and torch barrer of vedic knowledge in this age of darkness

Radhanath Swami who I am grateful to for encouraging me to speak to the public and be a story teller,

Introduction:

In the annals of ancient history, there exists a battle shrouded in myth and legend—a battle that transcends time and space, leaving an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of humanity. It is a battle where celestial forces clashed, heroes rose to unfathomable heights, and the echoes of their triumphs and tragedies reverberate through the ages. Welcome to the epic saga of the Battle of Kurukshetra.

Nestled within the pages of the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic, the Battle of Kurukshetra stands as the centerpiece—a cataclysmic clash that shaped the destiny of a nation and tested the very essence of human existence. Like a celestial tapestry woven with divine intervention and mortal endeavors, this battle encapsulates the eternal struggle between good and evil, righteousness and treachery, and the profound complexities of human nature.

Within the hallowed grounds of Kurukshetra, heroes from both sides of the conflict converge. On one side, the righteous Pandavas, led by the noble and virtuous Yudhishthira, find themselves confronted by the formidable Kauravas, led by the envious and ambitious Duryodhana. This epic confrontation becomes the crucible in which destinies intertwine and the fates of gods and mortals entwine.

Amidst the tumult of war, alliances are tested, friendships are shattered, and deep-rooted enmities unravel. Warriors adorned with celestial weapons and blessed by divine beings unleash their fury upon one another, leaving a trail of destruction and valor in their wake. From the mighty Arjuna, wielding the Gandiva bow and guided by the divine charioteer Krishna, to the indomitable Bhima, whose strength knows no bounds, each hero grapples with their own moral dilemmas and internal conflicts, mirroring the complex tapestry of human existence.

Yet, the Battle of Kurukshetra is not merely a clash of swords and arrows—it is a battle of philosophies, where the forces of righteousness, duty, and honor wage war against the dark shadows of greed, ego, and deception. Amidst the chaos, profound questions about the nature of life, the pursuit of truth, and the significance of one's actions echo through the battlefield, challenging the very fabric of existence.

As the dust settles and the cries of victory and loss fade into the ether, the Battle of Kurukshetra leaves an indelible mark on the human consciousness. Its tales of heroism and sacrifice, its complex characters grappling with the intricate web of destiny, continue to resonate with readers across time and cultures.

This book seeks to unveil the secrets and intricacies of this timeless battle, drawing from the ancient scriptures and delving into the depths of its symbolism and profound teachings. It is an exploration of the human condition, a journey into the realms of myth and philosophy, and a testament to the enduring power of stories that transcend time and cultural boundaries.

So, dear reader, join us as we embark upon a captivating odyssey into the heart of the Battle of Kurukshetra—an epic that reverberates with the echoes of gods and mortals, a tapestry where destinies are woven, and where the immortal dance of good and evil unfolds.

The story so far

The world trembled under the weight of destiny as the events of the Mahabharata unfolded, culminating in the fateful Battle of Kurukshetra. Honor and treachery clashed amidst the echoing war cries, and the heroes of this epic saga embraced their destinies with unyielding resolve.

In the kingdom of Hastinapura, the mighty Kuru dynasty stood divided by the ambitions and rivalries of its own blood. Pandu, the valiant king, had passed away, leaving his five sons—the noble Yudhisthira, the indomitable Bhima, the skilled archer Arjuna, the twin warriors Nakula and Sahadeva—under the watchful guidance of their mother, Kunti.

But their path was obstructed by the envious Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, who fueled the flames of conflict and fueled his own insatiable thirst for power. Beneath the surface of the kingdom, tensions simmered, alliances formed and shattered, and the ancient land prepared itself for the ultimate reckoning.

The dice of fate were cast, and in a game of chance, Yudhisthira, , wagered and lost everything—the kingdom, his brothers, and even himself. Bound by honor, the Pandavas were forced into exile, wandering the wilderness with their loyal wife, Draupadi.

During their years of exile, the Pandavas faced countless trials and tribulations. They encountered sages and celestial beings, sought mystical weapons, and delved into the depths of their own souls. Arjuna, the mightiest archer of his time, even journeyed to the heavens and received divine weapons from the gods themselves.

Meanwhile, Lord Krishna, the divine incarnation, guided and advised the Pandavas, serving as their charioteer, confidant, and guiding light. Krishna imparted profound wisdom and revealed

his cosmic form, urging Arjuna to fulfill his dharma and wage war against the Kauravas for righteousness and justice.

Finally, the stage was set for the climactic Battle of Kurukshetra. Two mighty armies faced each other, their banners billowing in the wind, as heroes and villains alike prepared to clash in a battle that would decide the fate of the realm. Courageous warriors adorned in majestic armor and wielding celestial weapons stepped forward to etch their names in history.

Amidst the chaos and bloodshed, Arjuna, his bow Gandiva in hand, stood at the forefront, leading his brothers and allies against the Kaurava forces. The battlefield became a tempestuous whirlwind of arrows, chariots, and fierce combat as warriors fell, heroes rose, and the ground shook with the weight of their determination.

The Battle of Kurukshetra became a crucible of honor, sacrifice, and self-realization. The Mahabharata teaches us that true victory lies not merely in conquest but in upholding righteousness and fulfilling our sacred duties.

In the end, the Pandavas emerged victorious, but the cost was immeasurable. The carnage and loss served as a stark reminder of the consequences of human ambition and the importance of staying true to one's principles.

The epic of the Mahabharata echoes through the ages, reminding us of the timeless lessons of honor, loyalty, duty, and the inevitable consequences of our actions. It is a tale of heroes and villains, of triumph and tragedy, and above all, a testament to the indomitable spirit of humanity.

DAY 1: The Dawn of War

The warriors awoke before sunrise, preparing for battle in various ways. Before delving into their living situation and conditions, it is essential to shed light on the army's organization, as described in the Mahabharata, my primary source of information. The armies resided in a vast encampment, likely divided by rank and the importance of the kings, princes, and other nobility participating in the battle. The warrior caste, known for its meticulousness and devotion to order, followed a strict chain of command. Respect was of utmost importance, especially towards higher-ranking warriors. The encampment featured separate areas for the royal and high-ranking Kshatriyas, as well as spaces for camp followers, servants, and priests. In the Drona-Parva, it is mentioned that the royal figures performed specific morning rituals, which held significant mystical significance in their order. After bathing, they were shown auspicious symbols to meditate upon, followed by fragrances and objects to touch. This process aimed to purify their senses, enabling their minds to act in the appropriate manner. Before sunrise, all warriors from the Kuru and Pandava armies began assembling on the battlefield.

Commanders shouted, "Assemble together," as the formidable Kuru division took shape. The collective sound of soldiers, horses, and elephants positioning themselves was deafening, causing the earth to tremble as if it would split open. The Kurus were the first to form their formation, completing it just as the first rays of the sun peeked over the horizon.

With the rising sun, the grand scale of the Kuru army came into view. Golden weapons and armor glistened among the ranks of the Kurus. As the light intensified, it illuminated the standards and flags of the Kurus, adorned with the colors of Indra's rainbow, made of gold, studded with gems, and shining like fire. Commanders such as Sakuni, Salya, Jayadratha, the princes of Avanti named Vinda and Anuvinda, the Kekaya brothers, Sudakshina, Srutayudha, Jayatsena, Vrihadballa, and Kritavarman led ten divisions. Bhisma, both the commander of the Kuru division and the entire army, stood on a silver chariot

clad in silver armor and a silver helmet. His white umbrella shielded him, while a large gold palm tree with five stars adorned his flag. Bhisma, resembling a full moon surrounded by clouds, stood at the forefront of the Kuru army. Turning to face them, Bhisma delivered a pre-battle speech to invigorate the troops.

Bhisma proclaimed, "Listen, warriors! A wide door now stands open before you, leading to heaven. If you pass through it, you will enter the realms of Sakra (Indra) or Brahman (liberation). The sages of old have shown us this eternal path. Honor yourselves by engaging in this battle with a focused mind. Great kings such as Nabhaga, Yayati, Mandhatri, Nahusa, and Nriga achieved success and attained the highest bliss through such actions. For a Kshatriya, dying of disease at home is ignoble. Death encountered in battle is their eternal duty."

Bhisma's speech held great significance. He conveyed the rarity of facing death prepared and how death is often feared and avoided by most people. However, the warriors on that field not only saw death's door wide open, but they were also blessed with the opportunity to face it and die in a fulfilling manner. Fear is a significant impediment in life, and death ranks among the greatest fears.

After Bhisma finished speaking, all the generals positioned themselves at the heads of their respective armies, except for Karna and his relations who, out of spite for Bhisma, stood apart. The kings on the Kuru side advanced, filling the ten points of the horizon with their resounding roars resembling those of lions. Their divisions gleamed brightly, adorned with white umbrellas, banners, standards, elephants, horses, chariots, and foot soldiers. The Earth trembled with the sounds of drums, tabors, cymbals, and the rattling of chariot wheels. The mighty warriors, adorned with golden bracelets, armlets, and bows, shone like fiery hills. Bhishma, the Senapati of the Kuru army, stood out among them all, with his large palmyra-standard embellished with five stars, resembling the radiant Sun itself.

The valiant archers among the Srinjayas, led by Dhrishtadyumna, looked like small animals in the presence of a mighty yawning lion when they beheld Bhishma. Indeed, fear repeatedly gripped all the warriors led by Dhrishtadyumna. The two armies, facing each other, appeared like two tumultuous oceans at the end of the Yuga, stirred by fierce Makaras and filled with enormous crocodiles. Never before had such a clash between two armies been witnessed or heard of, as that between the Kauravas and Pandavas.

Observing the Dhritarashtra divisions arrayed in battle formation, the virtuous Yudhishthira, son of Pandu and the just king, addressed Arjuna, saying, "According to the teachings of the great sage Brihaspati, it is said that the few should be condensed in battle, while the many can be expanded as desired. As our forces are fewer compared to the enemy's, O son of Pandu, following this advice of the great sage, arrange our troops."

Hearing this, Arjuna replied to King Dharmaraj, saying, "I will create for you, O best of kings, that unyielding formation known as Vajra, which was devised by Indra himself. It is an invincible array. He who is like a raging tempest, unstoppable by the enemy in battle, Bhima, the foremost of warriors, will lead us. With his exceptional knowledge of warfare, he will fight at the forefront, shattering the enemy's morale. Beholding Bhima, the foremost of warriors, whom all the hostile warriors, including Duryodhana, will retreat from in panic like small animals encountering a lion, we will gather around him, seeking his protection as if he were an impenetrable wall. There is no man in the world who could bear to gaze upon that mighty bull among men, Vrikodara, when he is angry."

Surpassing the towering standards adorning the chariots of both the Kuru and Pandava armies, there stood a colossal ape on Arjuna's chariot. Countless foot soldiers, armed with swords, spears, and scimitars, marched ahead to protect Bhimasena. Ten thousand elephants, their mouths and cheeks dripping with the

juice of temporal herbs, resembling clouds showering rain, endowed with immense courage, adorned in golden armor, resembling majestic mountains emitting the fragrance of lotus flowers, followed the king from behind. The indomitable and invincible Bhimasena, wielding his fierce mace that resembled the staff of death, seemed to crush the vast army of the Kurus. None of the combatants on the Kuru side dared to look at him, as he blazed like the scorching Sun itself, instilling fear in their hearts. This impregnable formation, named Vajra, fearless and facing all directions, armed with bows like lightning, was protected by the wielder of Gandiva, who was none other than the divine incarnation of Indra. As the Pandavas arranged their troops in this counter-formation against the Kuru army, they stood prepared for battle, and with the protection of the Pandavas, this formation became invincible in the realm of men.

As both armies stood at the break of dawn, awaiting the sunrise, a wind blew with drops of water falling, even though there were no clouds, and the sound of thunder could be heard. Dry winds swept all around, carrying a shower of pointed pebbles along the ground. Thick dust rose, enveloping the world in darkness, while large meteors fell towards the east, crashing against the rising sun, shattering into fragments with resounding noise. When the troops stood in their formations, the Sun rose without its usual radiance, and the Earth trembled with a loud sound, cracking in multiple places. Thunder rolled frequently from all directions, and the dust was so thick that nothing could be seen. The tall standards of the warriors, adorned with strings of bells, golden ornaments, flower garlands, and exquisite drapery, embellished with banners resembling the splendor of the Sun, vibrated with a jingling noise akin to a forest of swaying palm trees. Thus, the valiant sons of Pandu, ever rejoicing in battle, stood with their troops arranged in a counter-formation against the Kuru army, extracting the very essence from the Kuru warriors who cast their eyes upon Bhimasena, stationed at the forefront with his mace in hand.

Both armies, once arrayed, exuded equal joy. They appeared equally magnificent, resembling blooming forests, with a multitude of elephants, chariots, and horses. Both armies were vast and awe-inspiring, and neither could tolerate the other. They were prepared to conquer even the heavens, comprising exceptional individuals on both sides

The Kauravas, aligned with the Dhritarashtra faction, positioned themselves facing west, while the Parthas, the Pandavas, faced east, fully armed and ready for battle. The Kaurava troops resembled an army of powerful demons, while the Pandava forces appeared like celestial warriors.

A strong wind blew from behind the Pandavas, unsettling the Dhritarashtra soldiers, and the sounds of roaring beasts echoed against them. The elephants of your sons could not bear the overpowering fragrance emitted by the mighty elephants of the Pandavas, saturated with the essence of temporal herbs.

Duryodhana, mounted on a lotus-colored elephant with adorned temples, wearing a golden Kaksha on its back and covered in steel net armor, stood at the very center of the Kuru army. He was revered by bards and eulogists, while a white umbrella, radiating lunar effulgence, was held over his head by a golden chain. Accompanying him was Sakuni, the ruler of Gandhara, surrounded by the fierce mountain tribes of Gandhara (Afghanistan). The venerable Bhishma led the entire army, with a white umbrella held above his head, armed with bow and sword, donning a white headgear, a white banner on his chariot, and white steeds pulling it, resembling a mighty white mountain. Bhishma's division included all the sons of Dhritarashtra, as well as Sala, a warrior from the land of Valhikas, the Amvastas and Sindhus (Pakistan), the Sauviras, and the heroic dwellers of the five rivers' region. Positioned in a golden chariot drawn by red steeds, Dronacharya, the revered preceptor and master archer of almost all kings, remained behind the troops,

protecting them like Indra himself. Kripacharya, the son of Saradwat, a formidable warrior skilled in various forms of warfare, also known as Gautama, accompanied by the Sakas, Kiratas, Yavanas (Greeks and Turks), and Pahlavas, took his position at the northern point of the army. The large contingent, protected by mighty chariot warriors from the Vrishni and Bhoja clans (Krishna's personal army) and armed warriors from Surashtra, led by Kritavarman, advanced towards the southern section of the army. The ten thousand chariots of the Samasaptakas, created either for Arjuna's glory or demise, skilled in the art of warfare, followed closely behind Arjuna, as did the valiant Trigartas. The army also consisted of numerous elephants, each accompanied by a hundred chariots, each chariot by a hundred horsemen, each horseman by ten archers, and each archer by ten swordsmen with shields. Such were the divisions arranged by Bhishma.

Bhishma, the commander-in-chief, would allocate the troops each day, sometimes placing them in a formation resembling a human army, at other times like a celestial army, a Gandharva army, or even an Asura army. The army assembled by Bhishma, roaring like the ocean, consisting of numerous Maharathas, stood facing the west in an unbroken and formidable array. Though immense, it appeared terrifying. However, the Pandava army, although smaller in number, seemed vast and invincible to me because it was led by Krishna and Arjuna.

Witnessing the grand Kaurava army prepared for battle, King Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, was overcome by grief. Seeing the impenetrable formation created by Bhishma,

Beholding the vast Dhartarashtra army ready for battle, King Yudhisthira, the son of Kunti, was overcome with grief. As he saw the impenetrable array formed by Bhishma, he regarded it as truly impenetrable and his face turned pale. Addressing Arjuna, he said, "O mighty-armed Dhananjaya, how can we possibly fight against the Dhartarashtras, who have the Grandsire as their chief combatant? This array, designed by the

illustrious Bhishma according to the rules laid down in the scriptures, appears immovable and impenetrable. Our confidence in victory wavers, O vanquisher of foes. How will we achieve victory in the face of such a mighty formation?"

Arjuna, the slayer of foes, responded to Yudhisthira, who was plunged into grief at the sight of the Kuru army. He said, "Listen, O king, I will tell you the means by which a few soldiers can overcome many who possess every quality. You, O king, are free from malice, so I shall share this knowledge with you. The sage Narada knows it, as do Bhishma and Drona. Lord Brahma himself, on the occasion of the battle between the gods and the Asuras, spoke about this to Indra and the other celestials. He said, 'Those who seek victory do not conquer through sheer might and energy alone, but through truth, compassion, righteousness, and energy. Differentiate between righteousness and unrighteousness, understand the nature of covetousness, and fight with effort, free from arrogance. Victory lies where righteousness resides.'

"Therefore, O king, know that victory is certain for us in this battle. As Narada has proclaimed, 'There is victory where Krishna is.' Victory is inherent to Krishna; it follows Madhava. Just as victory is one of His attributes, humility is another. Govinda possesses infinite energy. Even amidst countless foes, He remains unperturbed. He is the eternal essence of masculinity. Victory dwells wherever Krishna is. Even in ancient times, when He appeared as Hari, the unconquerable wielder of invincible weapons, He spoke in a loud voice to the gods and Asuras, asking, 'Who among you desires victory?' Even the vanquished proclaimed, 'With Krishna leading us, we will conquer.' Through Hari's grace, the mighty Indra obtained dominion over the three worlds. Therefore, I see no reason for sorrow, O king, for you have the Sovereign of the Universe and the Lord of the celestials Himself wishing victory upon you."

King Yudhishthira, arranging his own troops in a counter array against Bhishma's divisions, encouraged them, saying, "The

Pandavas have now positioned their forces according to the prescribed rules. O sinless warriors, fight with fairness, aspiring to attain the highest heaven." In the center of the Pandava army stood Sikhandin and his troops, protected by Arjuna. Dhristadyumna led the vanguard, protected by Bhima. The southern division was guarded by the mighty bowman, the handsome Yuyudhana, a warrior of the Satwata race who resembled Indra himself.

Yudhisthira, adorned with an excellent standard, decorated with gold and gems, and riding a chariot worthy of carrying the king of heaven, positioned himself in the midst of his elephant divisions. A pure white umbrella with an ivory handle was raised over his head, adding to his majestic appearance. Numerous great Rishis circled around the king, uttering words of praise. Many priests, sages, and Siddhas walked alongside, chanting hymns and performing propitiatory ceremonies to ensure the destruction of their enemies through the power of mantras and rituals. Then, resembling the mighty Indra, the chief of the celestials, the high-souled Pandava chief, with a car worthy of that title, distributed cows, fruits, flowers, golden coins, and clothes to Brahmanas. The car of Arjuna, adorned with a hundred bells, made of the finest Jamvunada gold, and with shining wheels, exuded the brilliance of a thousand suns. Krishna held the reins of the chariot, and Arjuna, with Gandiva in hand and a quiver full of arrows, stood tall—an unparalleled archer, without equal on Earth or in the heavens.

Bhima, also known as Vrikodara, accompanied by the twins, protected the heroic chariot warriors of the Pandava army, resembling a furious lion or Indra himself standing on Earth. The sight of the invincible Vrikodara, proud leader of an elephantine herd, stationed in the vanguard, caused the warriors on the Kuru side to tremble with fear, their strength weakened.

Chapter 2 Bhagavad Gita

At this juncture, the Bhagavad Gita begins amidst the unfolding events. Dhritarashtra, having heard about the assembly of the army, turned to Sanjaya and inquired about what transpired.

As I am not an erudite scholar or a devout practitioner, my spiritual qualification lies solely in my ability to follow the guidance of great devotees. Speaking on a subject as profound as the Gita is beyond my capabilities. Thus, I defer to the Vaishnava Acarya, who eloquently conveyed the following words to Vyasa himself, receiving only responses of "More," "Again," and "Good." Here is an introduction to Madhvacarya's commentary on the Gita:

Out of compassion for the people afflicted by the loss of Dharma, the eternal principles and wisdom, and in accordance with the desires of Brahma, Rudra, and other celestial beings, the illustrious Vyasa descended to disseminate the ultimate wisdom. This descent occurred to propagate the means of attaining the desirable and avoiding the undesirable, to expound upon the essence of the Vedas in the context of the primordial world of Samsara, and to provide access to the knowledge of Dharma for those who are not entitled to Vedic teachings. Considering these factors, the compassionate Vyasa, who comprehends the words spoken throughout all the Vedas containing the wisdom of the indescribable Supreme, composed the Mahabharata. Through its profound examples, the Mahabharata enables one to directly realize the true form, qualities, and attributes of the Lord.

It has been stated: For the sake of those distressed in the cycle of Samsara, including those entitled but lacking Vedic knowledge, as well as women and leaders of the worlds like Brahma and Rudra, the Supreme Lord of the Gods, the Best of all beings,

was fervently invoked. In response to their prayers, the resplendent Vyasa descended in various forms and imparted the profound insights of the Vedas, which cannot be accessed through ordinary senses, into the greatest of the Vedas known as the Mahabharata. Thus, the Mahabharata, Pancharatra, Moola-Ramayana, Puranas, Bhagavat Purana, and many other excellent scriptures were created during the Kalpa known as Narayanashtakshara. Even Brahma does not possess complete knowledge of it, and others have only partial understanding. The sages themselves proclaim that Bharata, indeed, has multiple layers of meaning, as mentioned in the Narada Purana. At the request of Brahma and others, Lord Vishnu expounded the Bharata, which holds ten-fold meanings that are not comprehensible by all beings.

Skillfully composed, the Mahabharata is proclaimed as the Fifth and most superior of the Vedas, encompassing multiple layers of meaning and glorifying the supreme divinity of Sri Vishnu alone. The Skanda Purana declares that for the realization of the Supreme, the Mahabharata is even more suitable than the Vedas themselves. Even if a twice-born Brahmin possesses knowledge of the four Vedas, including the Upanishads, if they do not possess knowledge of the Puranas, they cannot be considered well-read. Alongside the great epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, the Puranas must also be embraced. The Vedas, fearing that ignorant individuals might distort their true meaning, ensured that the Mahabharata was presented to the people, the faithful, and the superior beings in that order. During ancient times, when Brahma and the other gods along with the seers weighed the Bharata and all the Vedas, it was the literature of Vyasa, the Mahabharata, that held significant weight. Due to this weight carrying the supreme Vedic principles, it is known as Mahabharata. According to Nirukta, it is renowned as the destroyer of all demerits. Whatever is contained within it can also be found elsewhere, and what is not contained in it cannot be found anywhere else. The Viraat and Udyoga chapters

contain the essence of the Mahabharata. Based on the aforementioned references, other perspectives, and the traditions of the seers, the greatness of the Mahabharata is firmly established.

All the Puranas and scriptures, as studied and spoken by Narada and others, unequivocally assert that Sriman Narayan alone could have authored the Mahabharata. How else could the knowledge of its meaning alone eliminate all demerits? This is a well-known belief with no reason to doubt its veracity. The other scriptures are incapable of achieving this. This fact is explicitly established by the scripture itself, not merely for the sake of praise. It is an undeniable truth. Furthermore, the Bhagavad Gita, as a subsidiary recital in the form of a dialogue between Vasudeva and Arjuna, encapsulates the essence of the entire Mahabharata, akin to the honey collected from the Parijata flower. Amongst all scriptures, the Mahabharata holds supremacy, and among the Mahabharata, the Gita is even more exceptional. As stated in the Kurma Purana, one should learn and study the thousand names of Sri Vishnu together with the Mahabharata, for they are the perennial principles capable of leading to the Supreme Abode. Such profound statements are found in the Mahakurma Purana.

In the Mahabharata, Sriman Narayan imparts the supreme dharma of the Kshatriyas to Arjuna, who is an embodiment of Indra, a qualified soul, and extremely dear. This is to ensure that Arjuna, in his role of confronting the enemies of Sriman Narayan and thwarting their actions according to their nature, does not, due to fraternal sentiments, deviate from the path of perennial principles (dharma)

Furthermore, in order to dispel Arjuna's confusion, Lord Krishna imparts teachings that align with his inclination and devoted mind. He emphasizes that the propitiation of the Lord alone is the supreme dharma, and everything contrary to it is not dharma, for everything indeed depends solely on the Lord. Lord Krishna states, "But if you do not engage in righteous battle, then shorn

of your righteous duty and glory, you will incur demerit" (Bhagavad Gita 11.33). He imparts various principles regarding warfare and states, "By propitiating Him through the performance of one's actions, the human being attains perfection" (Bhagavad Gita 18.46). Lord Krishna further advises, "One's own ordained dharma, even though imperfect, is preferable to the dharma ordained for others, even though perfectly followed. Death in the performance of one's own dharma is preferable, for the dharma ordained for others is fraught with danger" (Bhagavad Gita 3.35). He assures Arjuna of his beloved and established status, saying, "Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, perform sacrifices to Me, prostrate before Me, so that you shall come to Me alone. That is the Truth which I speak to you, for you are dear to Me" (Bhagavad Gita 18.65). Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to abandon all constraints placed by perennial principles and take refuge in Him alone, promising to deliver him from all demerits (Bhagavad Gita 18.66). Through such verses and others, it is recommended that adoration of the Lord by following dharmic principles is the sole form of action, and all actions other than these should be avoided.

Lord Krishna states, "I cannot be realized through Vedas, austerities, charity, or sacrifices in the form you have seen Me now" (Bhagavad Gita 11.53). However, He declares that through intense communion, He can be known, truly seen, and in principle, one can have similarity with Him (Bhagavad Gita 11.54). Such verses proclaim that devotion to Sri Vishnu alone is the surest means of deliverance for the wise, leading to both indirect and direct realization, as they are subservient to the Lord. Lord Krishna clarifies, "One who is intent on doing My work, one who looks to Me as the Supreme, one who is in communion with Me, is freed from attachments and harbors no enmity towards any creatures. Such a person is indeed very similar to Me, O Pandava" (Bhagavad Gita 11.55). These statements emphasize that devotees should engage in works in the form of adoration to the Lord and avoid works that are not recommended.

Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to perform actions as the ancients did in former times (Bhagavad Gita 4.15). This statement highlights the recommendation for wise individuals to work for the Lord. Lord Krishna reveals His difficult-to-be-seen form to Arjuna, asserting that even the gods are eager to witness this form (Bhagavad Gita 11.52). He reiterates His love and established connection with Arjuna, assuring him that He will guide him towards what is good (Bhagavad Gita 18.64). Lord Krishna explains that divine attributes lead to deliverance, while non-divine attributes lead to bondage. He advises Arjuna to abide in His divine nature, propitiating Him with an undistracted mind and being aware of the imperishable source of beings

"Sri Hari revealed His supreme and brilliant form to Partha" (XI.9). Through such verses and others, Arjuna's exceptional qualifications and the wisdom for direct realization are emphasized.

"Neither the hosts of gods nor even the great seers fully comprehend my manifestation. I transcend the gods and the great seers in every aspect." (X.2). "One who knows me, the unborn and without beginning, the Lord of all worlds, becomes free from all demerits and remains undeluded among mortals." (X.3). "Intellect, knowledge, absence of delusion, compassion, truth, self-restraint, tranquility..." (X.4). "The seven Seers in earlier ages..." (X.6). "The splendor and equanimity that emanate from me..." (X.7). "I am the origin of everything, and all emanates from me. The wise worship me with unwavering conviction." (X.8). "Out of compassion, I dispel the darkness arising from their lack of awareness, residing within their very selves..." (X.H). "I swiftly deliver them from the ocean of mortality..." (XII.7). "Recognizing me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and penances, as the Lord of the worlds, and benevolent towards all creatures, the ascetic attains peace." (V.29). "I will impart to you this wisdom and supra-sensory

awareness, knowing which there remains nothing else to be known." (VII.2).

"I am the origin and dissolution of the world" (VII.6). "O Arjuna, there is nothing superior to me. I alone string together all beings, like pearls on a necklace." (VII.7). "I will reveal to you, who does not waver, the profound secret. Through this wisdom and supra-sensory awareness, you will be liberated from inauspiciousness. This is the Sovereign Wisdom, the Supreme Secret..." (IX.1-2). "In my unmanifest form, I pervade this entire universe. All beings reside within me, yet I do not reside within them." (IX.4). "I sustain them, yet I am not confined by them." (IX.5). "No one is equal to you, how then can anyone be greater than you?" (XI.43). "Once again, I will declare the Supreme Wisdom, which is the pinnacle of all knowledge." (XIV.1). "My womb is the Great Brahma (Prakriti); from that womb, I bring forth creation. Through it, the birth of all creatures becomes possible, O Arjuna." (XIV.3). "For I am the abode of Brahman, the Immortal, the Imperishable, the Eternal, the Everlasting Principle, and the Blissful solitude." (XIV.27).

"In this world, there are two entities: the perishable and the imperishable. All creatures are perishable, while the Indweller is known as the imperishable. Yet, there exists another, the Supreme Person, referred to as the Supreme Self, who enters and sustains the three worlds, known as the Imperishable Supreme Lord. As I transcend the perishable and surpass even the imperishable, I am glorified in this world and in the Vedas as the Supreme Person. The one who, undeluded, recognizes Me as the Supreme Person is the knower of all and worships Me with their entire being, O Arjuna. Thus, I have imparted this most secret knowledge to you, O blameless one. By knowing this, one becomes wise and finds contentment in their actions, O Arjuna." (XV.16-20).

"I have no obligations or actions to perform in all these worlds, O Arjuna, nor is there anything to be attained that I do not already possess..." (XIII.22). Through such statements and others, such as 'the Lord is distinct among all,' 'all else is under His control,' 'He is not under the control of anyone else,' 'supreme among all,' 'full of all attributes,' 'supreme among all sciences,' and 'deliverance comes only from knowing Him,' it is certain.

"O Lord Sri Vishnu! Both sacrificers and men of wisdom should offer adoration, worship, and sacrifices to You. Even those who have realized their own Self should not argue, 'Having attained deliverance through wisdom, why should I now perform actions?' Instead, they should fulfill their ordained duties and enjoy the blissful excellence. The Purusha, pleased with devotion, grants the wisdom that is beneficial. Pleased with sincere devotion, He reveals His form. Similarly, pleased with exceptional devotion, He bestows deliverance. Even after attaining deliverance, one remains subservient to the Lord, adorned with eternal devotion. Devotion, even in deliverance, is not a means but an end in the form of blissful awareness. The Lord is independent even of Brahma, Rudra, Rama, and others. All are dependent on Him due to His completeness in all attributes. Devotion is recognizing Him as flawless and having excellent fraternal feelings toward Him. This is the supreme and best means. Through this alone, deliverance is assured; there is no other."

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Even the most accomplished human being is considered the lowest among the qualified ones. The seers and others belong to the intermediate category, while the gods represent the highest among the qualified beings. However, even the gods cannot attain the position of the Brahman without realizing it. By removing the sheath of non-awareness, one should attentively listen to the divine play. Through repeated listening, the sheath of non-awareness ceases to exist. Even among the gods, born as

Kshatriyas, wisdom was established, as in the case of Partha, when Vyasa removed the sheath of non-awareness.

To appease the Supreme Sri Vishnu, the fulfiller of all desires, who is the very Lord Himself in every respect, Rudra extolled His greatness through the recitation of the Rudriya hymn as a sacrificial offering. In a similar manner, O Ashwins, you also acquired abundance through food. In the beginning, only Sriman Narayana existed, not Brahma or Shankara. In silence, He contemplated, and then Vayu, Hiranyagarbha, Agni, Yama, Varuna, Rudra, Indra, and others were born. Narayana alone existed, not Brahma or Ishana. Vasudeva alone existed in the beginning, not Brahma or Shankara. Whomever Sri Vishnu desires, He makes them Brahma, Shankara, Indra, Surya, Yama, and Skanda. No one creates the Creator. Ever evolving, the god of gods, Sri Vishnu alone is the Great Summation. Nothing else is Truth. Speaking anything else as the Truth contradicts this. Except for the realization of Sri Vishnu, no other pursuits are considered as human goals, as stated in the Paingi Shruti.

"You are immeasurable. You are complete in Yourself. None can attain your greatness." "Resplendent Sri Hari is magnanimous, possessing numerous attributes without any flaws. There is no one similar or superior to You, anywhere to be found. Neither were there nor will there ever be anyone in the future, by their own strength or with the help of others," as mentioned in the Scriptures. In the verse "yastvatmoratireva syat," matters of deliverance are addressed. "For those who revel in the Self, no other actions are prescribed. Therefore, you must perform the prescribed actions," Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, as stated in the Skanda Purana. "For the men of contemplation, through the means of wisdom" (llT.3). This discourages individuals from relying solely on outward actions. "No one can remain without any action even for a moment" (lll.5). "Even the maintenance of one's physical life cannot be achieved without actions" (lll.8). "However, these actions should be performed without attachment and the desire for rewards. This, O Partha, is My determined and best perspective" (XVlll.6). Men of wisdom

should diligently carry out their ordained actions. It is not possible for everyone to renounce actions entirely. A recluse renounces outward actions due to their aversion towards them. "...the wise, the seers of that Truth... will impart that Wisdom to you" (IV.34). These words suggest that Wisdom emerges after the removal of the sheath of non-awareness.

Thus concludes the introduction to the Bhasya and Tatparya Nirnaya of Sri Madhva on Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishad, the science of the Absoute, , the scripture of equanimity, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna,

Chapter 3: Seeking Permission to Fight

As the mighty car-warriors of the Pandava party beheld Dhananjaya taking up his arrows and the Gandiva bow once again, they couldn't contain their excitement and let out a resounding shout. The Pandavas, along with the Somakas and their followers, filled with joy, blew their sea-born conches. Drums, pesis, karkachas, and cow-horns were beaten and blown together, creating a deafening uproar. Gods, along with Gandharvas, Pitris, and hosts of Siddhas and Charanas, came to witness the spectacle. Blessed Rishis arrived as a group, led by the one who had performed a hundred sacrifices, Indra, eager to witness the impending great slaughter.

Amidst the two armies that resembled two vast oceans, constantly moving and ready for battle, the righteous and noble King Yudhishthira, removing his coat of mail and discarding his excellent spear, descended from his chariot. With folded hands, he walked on foot, his gaze fixed upon the grandsire, maintaining silence and facing the east, where the enemy host stood.

Observing this, the Pandava brothers questioned their eldest brother, "O king, why do you abandon us and proceed on foot?"

Despite his brothers' inquiry, Yudhishthira, the son of the Kuru dynasty, remained silent and continued to advance.

Smilingly, the divine Lord Vasudeva, possessing great wisdom, addressed the Pandava brothers, saying, "I know his intentions. After paying his respects to his superiors such as Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and Salya, he will engage the enemy in battle. It is written in ancient chronicles that those who, according to the laws, show reverence to their preceptors, elders, and kin before fighting against their superiors are certain to achieve victory. That is my belief as well."

As Krishna spoke these words, a loud uproar of "Alas!" and "Oh!" erupted among Dhritarashtra's sons, while the opposing army remained eerily silent.

Observing Yudhishthira's approach, the warriors of Dhritarashtra's side conversed among themselves, expressing their disdain, "This king is a disgrace to his lineage. It is evident that he is trembling with fear as he makes his way towards Bhishma. Yudhishthira, along with his brothers, seeks shelter under Bhishma's wing. But why does the eldest son of Pandu, when he has Dhananjaya as his protector, along with Vrikodara, Nakula, and Sahadeva, come here trembling? Despite his fame in the world, it is clear that he was never truly born into the Kshatriya order, for he is weak and filled with fear at the thought of battle."

The warriors of Dhritarashtra's army praised their own side, rejoicing and waving their garments with cheerful hearts. They all criticized Yudhishthira, his brothers, and even Kesava (Krishna) himself.

Here, the inherent demonic nature of the forces fighting for the Kuru army is revealed. This war transcends mere earthly conflicts between kings; it is a battle between two cosmic forces. On one side are the Devas led by Sri Krishna, and on the other side are the Asuras led by the personification of Kali or Sin in the form of Duryodhana. Yudhishthira is simply showing respect to his elders, but the materialistic and jaded nature of the demons becomes evident. It is said that people are like oranges, and their true nature is revealed when they are squeezed. External circumstances only expose what lies beneath and do not contribute to one's inherent nature.

Having uttered their scornful remarks, the Kaurava army fell silent once again, pondering, "What will this king say? How will Bhishma respond? What boasts will Bhima make of his battle prowess? And what about Krishna and Arjuna? What does

Yudhishthira have to say?" The curiosity of both armies was piqued, particularly regarding Yudhishthira.

The king, accompanied by his brothers, swiftly made his way through the hostile array filled with arrows and darts, heading straight towards Bhishma. Upon reaching him, Yudhishthira humbly clasped Bhishma's feet and spoke these words to the valiant son of Santanu, who stood prepared for battle.

Yudhishthira said, "I offer my salutations to you, invincible one. We are prepared to fight against your illustrious self. Grant us your permission and bestow upon us your blessing."

Bhishma replied, "Had you not approached me in this manner, O lord of the earth, I would have cursed you, O great king, for bringing about your own defeat. But now, I am pleased with you, O son. Engage in battle and attain victory, O Pandava prince. Furthermore, ask for any boon that you desire from us. A man may be enslaved by wealth, but wealth itself is not the slave of anyone. This holds true, O king. I am bound by the Kauravas with their wealth, and therefore, I am compelled to speak like a eunuch. Apart from battle, what else do you wish for?"

Yudhishthira replied, "O wise grandfather, you have always consulted my welfare. I request you to fight for the sake of the Kauravas. This has always been my prayer to you."

Bhishma responded, "O king, O scion of the Kuru dynasty, what assistance can I provide you in this matter? I shall, indeed, fight for your enemies. Tell me what you have to say."

Yudhishthira implored, "Hence, O revered sire, I ask you and bow before you, O grandsire. How can we, in battle, overcome your invincibility? If you see any good in it, please enlighten me for my benefit."

Bhishma replied, "O son of Kunti, I do not see any person, even if he were the chief of the celestial beings, who can defeat me in battle. Furthermore, the time of my death has not yet arrived."

Yudhishthira expressed his respect, saying, "I offer my salutations to you, O revered grandsire. Therefore, I ask this of you. Please reveal to us how you may be defeated by your foes in battle."

Bhishma replied, "O King, I do not foresee any person who can vanquish me in battle. The time for my death has not yet arrived once again."

Yudhishthira, once again offering his respects, accepted Bhishma's words with a slight nod of his head. Accompanied by his brothers, he then made his way towards the chariot of their preceptor, Drona, as the watchful eyes of the soldiers followed their every move. Approaching Drona, the king paid his respects and circled around him before speaking words that were intended for his own benefit to the invincible warrior.

Yudhishthira said, "O unbeatable one, I seek your guidance on how to engage in battle without incurring sin. With your permission, O revered sage, how can I overcome all my foes?"

Drona replied, "If you had not come to me with the resolve to fight, O king, I would have cursed you for your complete defeat. However, I am pleased and honored by your presence, O sinless one. You have my blessings to fight and achieve victory. I am also willing to grant you a boon. Tell me your desires. Apart from battle, what do you wish for? I shall fight for the Kauravas, but I will pray for your victory."

Yudhishthira replied, "Pray for my victory, O revered sage, and advise me on what is beneficial for me. However, fight for the Kauravas. This is the boon I seek from you."

Drona said, "Victory, O king, is certain for one who has Lord Hari as his advisor. I also grant that you will conquer your enemies in battle. Where righteousness exists, Krishna is present, and where Krishna is present, victory follows. Go forth, fight, O son of Kunti! Ask me, what would you like me to say?"

Yudhishthira said, "I beseech you, O foremost of sages, listen to my plea. How can we defeat you, who are invincible, in the midst of the battle?"

Drona replied, "As long as I am engaged in combat, victory will never be yours. Therefore, O king, seek a swift end to my life along with your brothers."

Yudhishthira said, "Alas! O mighty-armed one, reveal to us the means of your demise. O revered preceptor, with tears in my eyes, I prostrate myself before you and ask for this."

"Drona spoke, 'O noble king, I do not see any foe who can slay me while I stand in battle, fully engaged, my wrath aroused, and continuously showering arrows. Unless I prepare for death, abandoning my weapons and withdrawing into deep meditation, no one will be able to defeat me. What I tell you is the truth. Know that I will lay down my arms in battle upon hearing something extremely unpleasant from a trustworthy source.'"

Hearing these wise words from the son of Bharadwaja and showing his reverence to the preceptor, Yudhishthira then approached the son of Saradwat. Saluting Kripa and circling around him, the eloquent king addressed the warrior of great valor with these words.

Yudhishthira said, "With your permission, O preceptor, I will fight without incurring sin, and with your consent, O sinless one, I will conquer all my enemies."

Kripa replied, "Had you not come to me with the intention to fight, I would have cursed you, O king, leading to your complete downfall. Apart from battle, what boon do you desire?"

Yudhishthira said, "Alas, I beseech you, O preceptor, listen to my words." Overwhelmed with emotions and agitation, the king stood in silence.

However, understanding his unspoken intentions, Gautama (Kripa) responded, saying, "O king, I cannot be slain. Fight and attain victory. I am pleased with your arrival. Every day, as I rise from my bed, I will pray for your triumph, O monarch. I say this with utmost truthfulness."

Hearing Gautama's words and showing him due respect, the king proceeded towards the ruler of the Madra kingdom. Approaching Salya and paying his respects by walking around him, the king spoke to that invincible warrior words that would serve his own interests.

Yudhishthira spoke, "With your permission, O invincible one, I will fight without incurring sin, and if you allow me, O king, I will vanquish my courageous foes."

Salya replied, "Had you not come to me with the intention to fight, I would have cursed you, O king. I am pleased and honored. Let it be as you desire. I grant you permission to fight and obtain victory. Tell me, O hero, what do you need? What shall I give you? Apart from battle, what is your desire?"

Yudhishthira said, "Even that is my request, O Salya, which I made during the preparations for this battle. Weaken the strength of Karna, the son of the charioteer, in the battlefield."

Salya said, "This wish, O Yudhishthira, shall be fulfilled, O son of Kunti. Go, fight according to your will. I shall ensure your victory."

Sanjaya continued narrating, "Having obtained the permission from his maternal uncle, the ruler of Madra, Yudhishthira, accompanied by his brothers, emerged from the vast army. Krishna then approached Karna, the son of Radha, on the battlefield. Gada's elder brother, acting on behalf of Kunti, spoke to Karna, saying, 'I have heard, O Karna, that due to your animosity towards Bhishma, you are unwilling to fight. Join our side, O son of Radha, and remain with us until Bhishma is slain. After Bhishma's death, O son of Radha, you can once again engage in battle on Duryodhana's side.'"

Karna replied, "I will not do anything that displeases Dhritarashtra's son, O Kesava. Know that I have dedicated my life to Duryodhana's well-being." Upon hearing Karna's words, Krishna ceased his persuasion and reunited with the sons of Pandu, led by Yudhishthira.

Then, in the presence of all the warriors, the eldest son of Pandu exclaimed loudly, "If any warrior feels they are fighting on the wrong side before the battle begins, they have my permission to join the opposing party!" Casting his gaze upon them, Yuyutsu spoke these words cheerfully to the righteous king Yudhishthira, "O sinless one, I will fight under your command, alongside the sons of Dhritarashtra. Accept me, O king, and I will fight for your cause."

Yudhishthira said, "Come, come, all of us will battle against your misguided brothers. O Yuyutsu, O mighty warrior, fight for my cause. It seems that the thread of Dhritarashtra's lineage and even his funeral rites rest upon you."

Chapter 4: The Battle Begins

Sanjaya spoke, "Yuyutsu, leaving behind the Kuru warriors, crossed over to the Pandava army amidst the beat of drums and clash of cymbals. King Yudhishthira, with his mighty arms, felt a surge of joy and adorned himself once again in his gleaming coat of golden armor. The valiant warriors mounted their chariots, ready to face the impending battle. They arranged their troops in their familiar formations and the sound of drums and cymbals filled the air. Their war cries echoed like the mighty roar of lions. Witnessing the sons of Pandu, the tigers among men, on their resplendent chariots, the kings on the opposing side, including Dhrishtadyumna and others, couldn't help but rejoice. They applauded the noble conduct of the Pandava princes, who showed great respect to those deserving of it. The kings present there praised their friendship, compassion, and loyalty to their kin, displayed at the appropriate time. Words of admiration and praise spread far and wide, captivating the hearts and minds of all who heard them. Even the Mlechchhas and Aryas who witnessed or heard about the virtuous behavior of the Pandavas were moved to tears and their voices choked with emotions. The warriors, filled with immense valor, sounded large drums and conches, their roars resounding like the milk-white conches themselves."

On that fateful morning, the horrifying battle that would claim the lives of numerous kings commenced. The loud war cries of the Kurus and the Srinjayas, both thirsting for victory, reverberated through the heavens and the earth. A tumultuous uproar filled the air, mingling with the twang of bowstrings and the blaring of conches. Men roared against one another like raging lions. The sound of bowstrings being stretched by skilled archers, the steady march of infantry, the thunderous neigh of charging steeds, the impact of sticks and iron hooks striking the heads of elephants, the clash of weapons, the jingling of bells as elephants clashed, and the clamor of chariots, resembling the

roar of thunderclouds, all blended together, creating a deafening cacophony that sent shivers down one's spine.

Before the relentless onslaught, the Kuru warriors, driven by their ruthless determination and malicious intent, charged with their banners held high towards the Pandavas. Bhishma himself, wielding a fearsome bow that resembled the staff of Death, advanced onto the battlefield, aiming to confront Arjuna. Arjuna, infused with tremendous strength, took hold of the renowned Gandiva bow and rushed to face Ganga's son. The two mighty warriors, both titans among the Kurus, were consumed by the desire to slay each other. However, despite the fierce assault unleashed by the son of Ganga, he could not shake the resolve of the son of Pritha, just as Arjuna's onslaught failed to make Bhishma falter.

Satyaki, the valiant archer, clashed fiercely with Kritavarman, their battle sending chills down the spines of onlookers. They inflicted wounds upon each other with resounding shouts, weakening their respective opponents. As arrows pierced their bodies, the two formidable warriors shone like blooming Kinsuka flowers adorned with colorful blossoms.

Abhimanyu, the mighty bowman, engaged in combat with Vrihadvala. However, in their encounter, the ruler of Kosala swiftly severed Subhadra's son's standard and brought down his charioteer. Filled with anger upon losing his charioteer, Subhadra's valiant son retaliated, piercing Vrihadvala with nine arrows. He then severed Vrihadvala's standard with a couple of sharp arrows and, with another arrow, cut down one of the protectors of his opponent's chariot wheel, along with the charioteer. These fearless adversaries continued to weaken each other with their deadly arrows.

Bhimasena, the mighty Bhima, engaged in a fierce struggle with Duryodhana, your son, the proud and arrogant warrior who had caused harm to the sons of Pandu. These two exceptional

warriors, both fierce as tigers and skilled in chariot warfare, unleashed a barrage of arrow showers upon each other. Observing these heroic and accomplished warriors, who possessed unparalleled expertise in various forms of warfare, all beings on the battlefield were filled with awe in the land of Bharata.

Dussasana, driven by fierce determination, charged towards the formidable car-warrior Nakula, piercing him with a barrage of sharp arrows that aimed for his vital organs. However, Nakula, with a laughter on his lips, swiftly retaliated by severing his opponent's standard and bow with his own arrows. In addition, he struck Dussasana with twenty-five small-headed arrows. Yet, the indomitable Dussasana, difficult to defeat, slew Nakula's steeds in the midst of their intense clash and cut down his standard.

Durmukha, with great speed, rushed against the mighty Sahadeva in that terrifying encounter, showering him with a flurry of arrows. However, Sahadeva, displaying his heroism, brought down Durmukha's charioteer with a sharp and powerful arrow. These two relentless warriors approached each other in combat, launching fierce attacks and attempting to defend against each other's strikes, striking terror into the heart of their opponent with their deadly shafts.

King Yudhishthira himself faced off against the ruler of the Madras, who, in his sight, cleaved Yudhishthira's bow in two. Undeterred, the son of Kunti discarded the broken bow and swiftly picked up a stronger one capable of delivering greater velocity. With straight arrows, the king fiercely targeted the ruler of the Madras, proclaiming his wrath and commanding him to wait.

Dhrishtadyumna, filled with determination, charged towards Drona, and in response, Drona, consumed by anger, severed the unyielding bow of the valiant prince of Panchala, a bow that had

claimed the lives of numerous foes. Simultaneously, he released a fearsome arrow that pierced the prince's body. Undeterred, Dhrishtadyumna swiftly grabbed another bow and fourteen arrows, piercing Drona in their intense clash. Enraged at each other, they continued their fierce battle.

Ghatotkacha, known for his ruthless deeds, confronted the Rakshasa Alamvusha, who was equally cruel, resembling the battle between Sakra and Vala. Ghatotkacha, with precision, pierced the infuriated and powerful Rakshasa with ninety sharp-edged shafts. In response, Alamvusha unleashed straight arrows, striking the mighty son of Bhimasena in various places. Mangled with wounds, they shone in their encounter, akin to the mighty Sakra and powerful Vala in the ancient battle between celestials and Asuras.

It is worth noting that while some believe Ghatotkacha joined the battle later in the war, he indeed fought from the very first day

The mighty Sikhandin, filled with determination, charged against Aswatthaman, the son of Drona. With a keen-edged shaft, Aswatthaman deeply pierced the enraged Sikhandin, causing him to tremble. In retaliation, Sikhandin struck Drona's son with an excellently tempered sharp-whetted arrow. They continued their fierce encounter, exchanging blows with various types of arrows.

Kripa, the son of Saradwat, swiftly rushed towards Vrihadkshatra, the ruler of the Kaikeyas, enveloping him in a relentless shower of arrows. Vrihadkshatra, in turn, unleashed a torrent of arrows upon the furious son of Gautama. In the course of their battle, they both slayed each other's steeds and severed each other's bows, rendering them without their chariots. Enraged to the core, they approached each other, ready to engage in sword combat. The ensuing duel between them was unparalleled and filled with terrifying intensity.

Within the broader engagement, countless individual clashes unfolded among the Pandava and Kuru warriors—charioteers facing off against charioteers, elephant riders against elephant riders, horsemen against horsemen, and foot-soldiers against foot-soldiers. Initially, the battle displayed a striking spectacle, but soon it erupted into a furious conflict, where chaos reigned supreme and discerning anything became impossible. Elephants clashed against elephants, chariots against chariots, steeds against steeds, and infantry against infantry. Heroes threw themselves into the melee, resulting in a relentless and confused combat. Even the celestial sages, Siddhas, and Charanas present there could only compare this horrific battle to the clashes between gods and Asuras. Thousands of elephants, chariots, and infantry units appeared to change their very nature as they repeatedly clashed on the same grounds.

Now, I shall recount the combats of hundreds and thousands of foot-soldiers, who fought without any consideration for familial ties or relationships. Sons did not recognize their fathers, fathers did not recognize their sons, brothers did not recognize their brothers, and maternal uncles did not recognize their sister's sons. Friends fought against friends, as if possessed by demons. Some mighty warriors, resembling tigers among men, met their demise with shattered chariots. Car shafts clashed against each other, breaking apart, while the spikes of car-yokes collided with one another. Warriors united in groups confronted other united groups, all thirsting for each other's lives. Cars became entangled with one another, obstructing their movement in the chaos of the battlefield.

Enormous elephants with torn temples fiercely clashed with each other, gouging deep wounds with their tusks. Those encountering their impetuous counterparts, adorned with grand structures and standards on their backs, engaged in a violent tusk battle, emitting agonized shrieks. Disciplined elephants, goaded by pikes and hooks, charged directly at those in a state

of rut. Some huge elephants, upon encountering their rutting companions, ran in all directions, emitting crane-like cries. Many well-trained elephants, their temples and mouths bleeding, were struck by swords, lances, and arrows, pierced in vital areas, and let out loud shrieks before collapsing and perishing. Some elephants ran wildly, emitting terrifying cries.

Foot-soldiers who guarded the elephants, possessing broad chests and skilled in effective striking, their anger ignited, armed themselves with pikes, bows, gleaming battle-axes, maces, clubs, short arrows, lances, shafts, and stout bludgeons with iron spikes. They fervently sought to take each other's lives, moving about in every direction. The sabres of valiant warriors clashed against each other, drenched in human blood, shining brightly. The whirling descent of swords, guided by heroic arms, landed on vital parts of foes, producing a resounding noise. The lamentations of combatants in the vast multitude, crushed by maces, clubs, well-tempered swords, elephant tusks, and trampling tuskers, as they called out to one another, resembled the wails of those condemned to hell.

Horsemen mounted on exceedingly swift chargers, their tails stretched out like swan plumes, charged at one another. Golden-adorned, long-bearded darts, swift, polished, and sharply pointed, were hurled by them, falling like snakes. Some courageous horsemen, mounted on fleet steeds, leaped high and severed the heads of chariot warriors from their cars. And in some instances, a charioteer, with bodies of cavalry within range, slew many with straight-shafted arrows. Fierce elephants, adorned with golden trappings and resembling newly-risen clouds, trampled the steeds underfoot, crushing them with their own legs. Other elephants, struck on their foreheads and flanks and lanced by spears, shrieked in agony.

Amidst the chaos of the melee, numerous colossal elephants trampled down steeds and their riders, casting them aside. Some

elephants, with the points of their tusks, flung steeds and their riders aside, wreaking havoc on chariots and their standards. Male elephants, filled with boundless energy and their temporal juice flowing abundantly, used their trunks and legs to slay steeds and their riders. Swift arrows, polished and sharp-pointed like snakes, rained down upon the heads, temples, flanks, and limbs of elephants. Javelins of menacing appearance, resembling meteoric flashes, launched by valiant warriors, pierced through the bodies of men and horses, cutting through mail armor. Warriors wielding gleaming sabres, drawn from sheaths made of leopard and tiger skins, slew their adversaries on the battlefield. Despite being attacked and sustaining severe injuries, some warriors fiercely retaliated with swords, shields, and battle-axes. Elephants, seizing cars with their steeds and toppling them, wandered in various directions, guided by the cries of those behind them.

Amidst the tumult, warriors impaled by javelins, cleaved by battle-axes, crushed by elephants, trampled by horses, cut by car-wheels, or struck by axes called out loudly to their kinsmen. They called upon their sons, fathers, brothers, and other relatives. Some sought help from their maternal uncles or sister's sons. Others called out to anyone on the field of battle. A great number of combatants either lost their weapons or suffered broken thighs. Some, with arms torn off or sides pierced, wailed aloud, clinging to life. Weakened and tormented by thirst, some lay on the bare ground, pleading for water. Others, lying in pools of blood, criticized themselves and the assembled Kurus for engaging in battle.

There were brave Kshatriyas who, despite injuring one another, did not relinquish their weapons or cry out in pain. Instead, they roared with joy in their respective positions, biting their own lips in fury, their faces fierce with contracted eyebrows. Some endured great suffering, enduring arrows and wounds in silence. Heroic chariot warriors, stripped of their own cars in the battle and wounded by massive elephants, requested assistance to be lifted onto the chariots of others. Many warriors, adorned with

wounds, resembled blossoming Kinsuka flowers. Countless terrifying cries echoed throughout the divisions. In that dreadful combat, where no consideration was given to kinship, fathers slew sons, sons slew fathers, nephews slew maternal uncles, and maternal uncles slew nephews. Friends killed friends, and relatives slew their own kin. This slaughter unfolded in the fierce encounter between the Kurus and the Pandavas. In that frightful and terrible battle, divisions of the Pandavas began to falter as they confronted the mighty-armed Bhishma, who shone like the moon under the peak of Mount Meru, seated on his grand chariot adorned with a silver standard bearing the device of the palmyra tree and five stars.

Chapter 5

The Next Generation Shows their prowess

As the dreadful battle continued, Durmukha, Kritavarman, Kripa, Salya, and Vivinsati, urged by Duryodhana, approached Bhishma to protect him. With those five mighty warriors guarding him, Bhishma penetrated the Pandava host. His palmyra standard glided through the ranks of the Chedis, Kasis, Karushas, and Panchalas. Bhishma, wielding broad-headed and straight arrows of great swiftness, severed the heads of his foes along with their chariots, yokes, and standards. He seemed to dance on his chariot as it swiftly moved. Some elephants struck by his arrows in vital spots shrieked in agony.

In a fit of anger, Abhimanyu, mounted on his chariot drawn by excellent tawny steeds, charged towards Bhishma's chariot. Adorned with a gold-standard resembling a Karnikara tree, he confronted Bhishma and the other car-warriors protecting him. Abhimanyu pierced Kritavarman with one arrow and Salya with five, weakening his great-grandsire Bhishma with nine arrows. With a perfectly aimed arrow, he severed Bhishma's gold-adorned standard. Using a well-shot broad-headed arrow, Abhimanyu cut off the head of Durmukha's charioteer. He also sliced through Kripa's gold-decked bow with another sharp arrow. With his furious onslaught and numerous sharp arrows, Abhimanyu appeared to be dancing on the battlefield. His remarkable skill amazed the gods themselves. The car-warriors, including Bhishma, considered him equal to the great Arjuna in archery prowess. Abhimanyu's bowstring twanged like Gandiva and seemed to rotate like a circle of fire while being stretched and released. Bhishma, the slayer of heroic foes, then rushed at Abhimanyu and swiftly pierced him with nine arrows. With three broad-headed arrows, he also severed Abhimanyu's standard. Despite the attacks from Kritavarman, Kripa, and

Salya, Arjuna's son stood firm like the Mainaka mountain and showered arrow after arrow upon the five car-warriors. Abhimanyu's torrent of arrows thwarted their powerful weapons, and he targeted Bhishma with his shafts, emitting a resounding shout. Even under such intense pressure from the mighty warriors of the Kaurava army, the strong-armed son of Arjuna stood his ground and continued his relentless attack. His arms displayed immense strength. Bhishma, although impressed by Abhimanyu's prowess, also shot arrows at him, but they were all cut down by the valiant warrior. In that battle, Abhimanyu cut off Bhishma's standard with nine arrows, and the people there cheered loudly as the jeweled silver standard, bearing the palmyra tree device, fell to the ground. Observing the standard fall due to Subhadra's son's arrows, the proud Bhima cheered loudly to support Abhimanyu.

During the intense combat, Bhishma invoked numerous celestial weapons of great power. The immeasurable-souled grand sire covered Subhadra's son, Abhimanyu, with a barrage of thousands of arrows. In response, ten formidable warriors and skilled charioteers of the Pandavas rushed to protect Abhimanyu. They were Virata and his son, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, Bhima, the five Kekaya brothers, and Satyaki. As they approached with great force, Bhishma, the son of Santanu, pierced the prince of Panchala with three arrows and Satyaki with ten. Using a razor-sharp, winged arrow released from his fully stretched bowstring, Bhishma severed Bhima's standard. The golden lion-emblazoned standard of Bhima, cut off by Bhishma's arrow, fell from his chariot. Bhima retaliated by piercing Santanu's son, Bhishma, with three arrows, Kripa with one, and Kritavarman with eight.

Uttara, the son of Virata, mounted on an elephant with its trunk raised, charged at the ruler of the Madras, Salya. However,

Salya managed to halt the furious onslaught of the mighty elephant prince. In great anger, the elephant prince placed his leg on the yoke of Salya's chariot and killed his four powerful and swift steeds. Salya, now standing on his car with slain steeds, hurled an iron dart resembling a snake to kill Uttara instantly. The dart pierced through Uttara's armor, rendering him senseless, and he fell from the neck of his elephant, losing his grip on the hook and lance. Salya then unsheathed his sword, leaped from his excellent chariot, and beheaded the prince of elephants. With arrows riddling its coat of mail and its head severed, the elephant let out a loud shriek, collapsed, and breathed its last. Having accomplished this feat, the ruler of the Madras swiftly mounted the splendid chariot of Kritavarman.

Witnessing his brother Uttara slain and seeing Salya accompanied by Kritavarman, Sweta, the valiant son of Virata, became inflamed with anger like fire fueled by clarified butter. He grabbed his formidable bow, reminiscent of Indra's own bow, and charged with the intent of slaying Salya, the ruler of the Madras. Encircled by a mighty division of chariots, he advanced towards Salya's chariot, unleashing a torrential shower of arrows. However, seven warriors from the Kaurava side swiftly surrounded him, determined to protect Salya from the clutches of death. These warriors were Vrihadvala, the king of the Kosalas, Jayatsena of Magadha, Rukmaratha, the valiant son of Salya, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, Sudakshina, the king of the Kamvojas, and Jayadratha, the ruler of the Sindhus and a relative of Vrihadkshatra. The bows of these high-spirited warriors, adorned with diverse colors, resembled flashes of lightning amidst dark clouds. They unleashed a ceaseless downpour of arrows upon Sweta, akin to rain falling on the mountain's breast in the waning days of summer.

Enraged by their assault, Sweta retaliated by striking their bows with seven powerful and broad-headed arrows, rendering them useless. Witnessing their bows severed, the furious warriors

swiftly grasped seven darts and shouted loudly. They hurled these blazing darts, resembling meteors, towards Sweta's chariot. However, Sweta, well-versed in mighty weapons, effortlessly intercepted the darts with seven broad-headed arrows before they could reach him.

Sweta then aimed a penetrating arrow, capable of striking any part of the body, at Rukmaratha. The forceful arrow surpassed the might of a thunderbolt and pierced through Rukmaratha's body. Struck forcefully, Rukmaratha collapsed and fell into a deep swoon on the terrace of his chariot. Unperturbed, his charioteer swiftly carried him away, unconscious and in a swoon, before the eyes of all. Sweta, wielding six other gold-adorned arrows, proceeded to sever the standard-tops of his six adversaries. He also pierced their steeds and charioteers, while showering the six warriors themselves with relentless arrows. With determination, he advanced towards Salya's chariot.

Witnessing the swift approach of this formidable warrior from the Pandava forces towards Salya's chariot, the Kuru army erupted with cries of concern and distress. Mighty Duryodhana, accompanied by Bhishma and supported by heroic warriors and numerous troops, rushed to Sweta's aid, rescuing the endangered ruler of the Madras from the clutches of death.

Thus began a hair-raising and terrifying battle between the Kuru troops and their adversaries, where chariots and elephants became entangled in a chaotic mix. Bhishma, leading the Kuru forces, unleashed showers of arrows upon Subhadra's son, Bhima, the mighty charioteer Satyaki, the ruler of the Kekayas, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, and the Chedi troops

Chapter 6

The Heroic Prowess of Sweta

Amidst the battlefield, hundreds and thousands of courageous and powerful charioteers, resembling bulls among Kshatriyas, led by the great hero Sweta and accompanied by Sikhandin, were determined to rescue Sweta from his predicament. They charged towards Bhishma's golden-adorned chariot, intent on slaying the foremost warrior. The ensuing battle was nothing short of terrible.

Allow me to describe to you the incredible and fearsome encounter that took place between the Kuru troops and the enemy forces. Bhishma, the son of Santanu, made the terraces of numerous chariots empty as he showered his arrows, severing countless heads. Endowed with energy equal to that of the Sun himself, he covered the very Sun with his arrows and dispersed his adversaries around him, just like the rising Sun dispels darkness. In that fierce combat, he shot hundreds and thousands of powerful arrows possessing tremendous force, claiming the lives of innumerable Kshatriyas. He felled the heads of brave warriors and elephants donned in impenetrable armor like mountains struck down by the thunderbolt of Indra. Chariots were entangled with other chariots, and steeds collided with other steeds. Impetuous horses carried fallen young warriors, their lifeless bodies hanging from the saddles while their bows

remained in their grasp. With swords and quivers still attached to their bodies and their armor loosened, hundreds of fallen warriors, heroes in their own right, lay on the ground as if sleeping on beds befitting their valor.

Combatants clashed, falling and rising again, repeatedly engaging in close-quarter combat. Many warriors rolled on the battlefield, afflicted by their opponents. Enraged elephants charged in all directions, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of charioteers. Chariots, along with their riders, were crushed from all sides, and some warriors fell upon the chariots of others, slain by arrows. Mighty charioteers could be seen falling from great heights, their charioteers also slain. A thick dust cloud arose, making it difficult for warriors to discern their adversaries. They relied on the sound of bowstrings and the divisions of the opposing forces to guide their arrow shots. The hissing sound of arrows flying through the air was drowned out by the deafening noise of drums that seemed to pierce the ears. Amidst this tumultuous uproar that made one's hair stand on end, the names of warriors, as they displayed their prowess, were indistinguishable. Fathers could not recognize their own sons, and chariot warriors were thrown off their vehicles when a wheel was broken, the yoke torn off, or one of their steeds slain by straight arrows. Many brave warriors, deprived of their chariots, were seen fleeing from the battlefield.

The battle raged on with intense fury, as both sides fought relentlessly, inflicting heavy casualties and wreaking havoc upon the battlefield

The battle between Bhishma and Sweta was fierce and awe-inspiring. Sweta, in a display of great prowess, caused a massive slaughter among the Kuru forces. He killed countless noble princes, beheading them by the hundreds and thousands. His arrows severed the arms adorned with Angadas and the bows of

numerous charioteers. Sweta's onslaught brought destruction upon chariots, car-wheels, riders, the chariots themselves, as well as small and expensive standards. Even large groups of horses and crowds of men fell victim to Sweta's relentless assault. Surprisingly, all the Kurus, armed for combat but beyond the reach of arrows, stood as spectators and abandoned Bhishma, the son of Santanu, in the midst of the battle. Bhishma, standing alone, immovable like the mountain Meru, remained cheerful even in the face of universal despair.

Bhishma, akin to the Sun in the waning days of winter, shone with resplendent golden rays from his chariot. As a great archer, he shot clouds of arrows, striking down the enemy warriors. While being slaughtered by Bhishma in that dreadful combat, the warriors, breaking away from their ranks, fled from him as if escaping a raging fire. Bhishma, devoted to Duryodhana's well-being, fearlessly engaged the Pandava warrior, Sweta, and began to decimate the Pandava army in the fierce conflict.

Observing the mighty warrior Sweta striking the Kaurava divisions, Bhishma, also known as Devavrata, impetuously charged towards him. Sweta skillfully enveloped Bhishma with a dense network of arrows, and in turn, Bhishma showered Sweta with a storm of arrows. Roaring like two raging bulls, they clashed like two colossal elephants or two ferocious tigers. These two mighty warriors, Bhishma and Sweta, engaged in a battle where their weapons deflected each other's strikes as they fought relentlessly to claim each other's lives. Bhishma, filled with anger, could have annihilated the Pandava army in a single day if it weren't for Sweta's protection. The Pandavas rejoiced upon seeing their grandfather Bhishma thwarted by Sweta, while Duryodhana became disheartened. Angered and accompanied by numerous kings, Duryodhana led his troops in a charge against the Pandava host. Meanwhile, Sweta, abandoning Bhishma, fiercely attacked Duryodhana's forces like a powerful gust of wind uprooting trees. The son of Virata, driven by rage, routed the Kuru army and once again approached Bhishma's position. These two valiant and formidable warriors, both

unleashing a barrage of arrows, fought each other with the intent to slay. Sweta drew his bow to its fullest extent and struck Bhishma with seven arrows, but Bhishma, displaying his own prowess, quickly subdued Sweta's valor, similar to an enraged elephant subduing its rival. Sweta, undeterred, struck Bhishma, and in return, Bhishma pierced him with ten arrows. Despite being struck, the mighty warrior Bhishma stood firm like a mountain. Sweta, in turn, pierced Santanu's son with twenty-five straight arrows, leaving everyone in awe. Smiling, Sweta cut Bhishma's bow into ten fragments with ten arrows, and with a plumed iron arrow, he shattered the palmyra on top of Bhishma's standard. Witnessing the fallen standard, the Kurus thought that Bhishma had been slain, succumbing to Sweta. The Pandavas, filled with delight, sounded their conches, and Duryodhana, in a fit of anger, rallied his troops for battle, taking great care to protect Bhishma, who was in dire straits. Even the idle spectators were encouraged to join the fight to support Bhishma.

As the battle raged on, the king declared that either Sweta or Bhishma would perish that day. Hearing this, the mighty warriors swiftly advanced, forming four divisions, to protect Bhishma, the son of Ganga. Valhika, Kritavarman, Kripa, Salya, the son of Jarasandha, Vikarna, Chitrangada, and Vivinsati surrounded Sweta on all sides, unleashing a relentless barrage of arrows upon him. However, Sweta skillfully defended himself, displaying his dexterity and agility. Like a lion among a multitude of elephants, he held off his attackers and severed Bhishma's bow with a barrage of arrows.

Undeterred, Bhishma, taking up another bow, pierced Sweta with arrows adorned with Kanka bird feathers. In response, the Pandava commander, filled with wrath, unleashed a multitude of arrows upon Bhishma in the sight of all. Witnessing Bhishma, the greatest hero in the world, being checked and wounded by Sweta, both Duryodhana and the entire Kaurava army were

greatly troubled. They began to believe that Sweta had slain Bhishma in battle. Enraged, Devavrata, Bhishma's other name, seeing his own standard fallen and the Dhartarashtra army halted, unleashed a barrage of arrows upon Sweta.

However, Sweta skillfully repelled all of Bhishma's arrows and once again severed the grandsire's bow, this time with a broad-headed arrow. Filled with anger, Bhishma discarded his broken bow and took up a larger and stronger one. He aimed seven large, broad-headed arrows, sharpened on stone, and with four of them, he slew Sweta's four steeds. With two more arrows, Bhishma cut off Sweta's standard, and with the seventh arrow, he severed the head of Sweta's charioteer. This caused Sweta, deprived of his chariot and its steeds, to become greatly troubled. Bhishma, seeing Sweta, the foremost among charioteers, without his chariot, attacked him from all sides with a relentless shower of arrows.

Smitten by Bhishma's arrows, Sweta, leaving his bow on his abandoned chariot, picked up a golden-decorated dart. Holding the fearsome and fierce dart, resembling the rod of Death itself, Sweta addressed Bhishma, saying that Bhishma should wait and witness his valor. With great wrath, Sweta hurled the dart, intending to bring harm to Bhishma on behalf of the Pandavas and to fulfill your evil desires. The Kuru army cried out in distress upon seeing the terrifying dart, resembling the rod of Death, hurtling through the air. Fearlessly, Bhishma, with eight sharp and winged arrows, sliced the dart into nine fragments as it blazed through the sky. The Kurus erupted in joyous shouts upon witnessing this feat. However, Sweta, overcome by anger, became senseless and unsure of what to do.

Enraged and with eyes red in wrath, Sweta, with mace in hand, rushed toward Bhishma like a swollen torrent against rocks. Seeing the unstoppable force of Sweta's attack, Bhishma, endowed with great prowess and knowledge of others' strengths, swiftly alighted from his chariot to defend against the impending blow. Sweta, swirling with rage, hurled the heavy

mace toward Bhishma's chariot, reminiscent of the god Maheswara. The impact of the mace reduced Bhishma's chariot, along with its standard, charioteer, steeds, and shaft, to ashes.

On the first day of the battle of Kurukshetra, Bhishma, the foremost of car-warriors, became a combatant on foot after his chariot was destroyed. Seeing this, many car-warriors, including Salya and others, rushed to his aid. Bhishma then mounted another chariot and slowly advanced toward Sweta, the mighty car-warrior.

At that moment, Bhishma heard a celestial voice from the skies, urging him to strive without wasting any time, as this was the destined hour for his victory. Filled with joy upon hearing these words, Bhishma resolved to defeat Sweta. Many powerful warriors of the Pandava side, such as Satyaki, Bhimasena, Dhrishtadyumna, the Kekaya brothers, Dhrishtaketu, and Abhimanyu, rushed to defend Sweta. However, Bhishma, with the support of Drona, Salya, and Kripa, successfully held them off like a mountain resisting the wind.

Despite the resistance, Sweta managed to cut off Bhishma's bow. Enraged and determined, Bhishma quickly took up another bow that shone like Indra's bow. With Bhimasena and Abhimanyu and other warriors under his control, Bhishma advanced steadily toward Sweta.

In the ensuing battle, Bhimasena struck Bhishma with sixty arrows, but Bhishma, with his formidable skill, repelled Bhimasena, Abhimanyu, and others with three powerful arrows. He also struck Satyaki with a hundred arrows, Dhrishtadyumna with twenty, and the Kekaya brothers with five arrows. Unfazed by their attacks, Bhishma advanced towards Sweta alone.

Then, Bhishma took out an arrow that resembled Death itself and had the force of the Brahma weapon. The gods, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Uragas, and Rakshasas witnessed this mighty arrow.

With the splendor of a blazing fire, the arrow pierced through Sweta's armor and body, striking the earth with a flash like lightning. Sweta, his life taken away, fell in battle like a fallen mountain peak.

The Kauravas rejoiced at Sweta's defeat, and Dussasana danced with joy accompanied by the sounds of conches and drums. The mighty warriors of the Pandava side, led by Sikhandin, trembled in fear upon witnessing Bhishma's prowess. Arjuna and the warriors of the Vrishni clan slowly withdrew their troops for the night, while both armies roared with anticipation. The Pandavas, deeply affected by the loss, retired to their quarters, reflecting on the dreadful slaughter that occurred in the single combat.

Thus, the first day of the battle of Kurukshetra concluded.

Chapter 7

Yudhisthiras Doubts

Sanjaya continued, recounting the words of King Yudhisthira to Lord Krishna after the first day of battle. Filled with grief and witnessing Bhishma's formidable prowess, Yudhisthira expressed his concern and despair. He described Bhishma as a mighty warrior who was devastating his troops like fire consuming dry grass. Yudhisthira felt helpless in the face of Bhishma's power and saw no way to overcome him.

Yudhisthira lamented his own lack of understanding and contemplated retreating to the forest instead of sacrificing his army to Bhishma's might. He believed that Bhishma, armed with celestial weapons, would annihilate his forces. Yudhisthira saw his army, driven by their loyalty to him, rushing to their own destruction like insects drawn to a blazing fire.

Feeling responsible for the pain and suffering his brothers endured and the loss of their sovereignty and happiness, Yudhisthira valued life and decided to devote the rest of his days to severe ascetic austerities, sparing his friends from being slain. He sought Krishna's advice on what should be done to help him in this dire situation.

Yudhisthira then expressed his disappointment with Arjuna, who appeared indifferent and passive in the battle. He acknowledged Bhima's great strength and commitment to his Kshatriya duties, but recognized that Bhima alone could not destroy the enemy host in a fair fight. Yudhisthira believed that Bhishma and Drona, wielding celestial weapons, were consuming the Kshatriyas, and Arjuna seemed unconcerned about their plight.

Yudhisthira implored Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, to find a great warrior who could bring an end to Bhishma's might, just as rain extinguishes a forest fire. He believed that with Krishna's grace, once their foes were vanquished and their kingdom restored, the sons of Pandu would find happiness with their loved ones.

Thus, Yudhisthira expressed his distress, seeking guidance and a solution to the overwhelming challenge posed by Bhishma's prowess in the battle

After Yudhisthira expressed his grief and despair, Lord Krishna consoled him and the Pandavas, reminding them of their own heroic abilities and the support they had from powerful warriors on their side. Krishna assured Yudhisthira that he, along with Satyaki, Virata, Drupada, Dhrishtadyumna, and others, were all dedicated to his welfare and ready to fight for him. Krishna specifically mentioned Dhrishtadyumna, who was appointed as the commander of the Pandava forces and was known for his prowess as the slayer of Bhishma.

Yudhisthira, in the presence of Vasudeva (Krishna), affirmed Dhrishtadyumna's command and entrusted him with the responsibility of leading their army. He compared Dhrishtadyumna to Kartikeya, the commander of the celestial host, and instructed him to slay the Kauravas with his prowess. Yudhisthira pledged his support, along with Bhima, Krishna, the sons of Madri, the sons of Draupadi, and the other kings who stood with them.

Dhrishtadyumna, acknowledging his role and authority as the commander, declared that he was the ordained slayer of Drona, appointed by Lord Shiva himself. He expressed his determination to fight against Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Salya, Jayadratha, and the other proud Kuru monarchs. His defiant words filled the Pandava warriors with energy and they responded with a loud shout.

Yudhisthira then instructed Dhrishtadyumna to form a powerful battle formation called the Krauncharuma array, which was capable of destroying enemy divisions. Yudhisthira mentioned that this formation was spoken of by Vrihaspati to Indra during the battle between the gods and the Asuras. The Pandavas, along

with the Kurus, beheld this unseen array, ready to unleash destruction upon their foes.

Thus, Yudhisthira reassured his warriors and entrusted Dhrishtadyumna with the command, instilling confidence and determination in the Pandava army as they prepared to face their formidable enemies

Chapter 8

The Morning of the Second day of the War

As morning arrived, Dhrishtadyumna positioned Arjuna at the forefront of the entire army. Arjuna's celestial standard, crafted by the divine architect at the command of Lord Indra, appeared extraordinarily beautiful as it moved through the skies. Adorned with banners resembling the colors of Indra's bow, it glided gracefully like a fleeting structure of vapor in the sky, following the track of Arjuna's chariot. The bearer of Gandiva, accompanied by that splendid standard embellished with gems, looked resplendent.

King Drupada, surrounded by a large number of troops, took his position at the head of the formation. Kuntibhoja and Saivya stood as the two eyes of the array. The ruler of the Dasarnas,

along with the Prayagas, Daserakas, Anupakas, and Kiratas, formed the neck of the formation. Yudhishthira, joined by the Patachcharas, Hunas, Pauravakas, and Nishadas, commanded the right wing, while Kundavishas, Mandakas, Ladakas, Tanganas, Uddras, Saravas, Tumbhumas, and Vatsas stood with Nakula and Sahadeva on the left wing. The joints of the wings were fortified with ten thousand chariots, the head with a hundred thousand, the back with a hundred million and twenty thousand, and the neck with a hundred and seventy thousand chariots. Massive groups of elephants, resembling blazing mountains, were stationed at the joints, wings, and extremities of the wings. The rear of the formation was guarded by Virata, supported by the Kekayas, the ruler of Kasi, and the king of the Chedis, with their thirty thousand chariots. Thus, the Pandavas, fully armored and eagerly awaiting sunrise, formed their mighty array.

Their white umbrellas, clean and magnificent, radiated brilliance like the sun, adorning their elephants and chariots.

Upon seeing the formidable and awe-inspiring Krauncha formation formed by Arjuna, your son Duryodhana, along with the preceptor Drona, Kripa, Salya, Somadatta's son, Vikarna, Ashwatthama, and all his brothers, led by Dushasana, approached them. Your son, aiming to boost their morale, spoke timely words to gladden their hearts.

"Armed with various weapons and well-versed in the scriptures, each of you is individually capable of slaying the sons of Pandu and their armies in battle. What to speak of when you are united? Our army, protected by Bhishma, is immeasurable, while theirs, protected by Bhima, is limited. Let the Samsthanas, Surasenas, Venikas, Kukkuras, Rechakas, Trigartas, Madrakas, Yavanas, Satrunjayas, Dussasana, the valiant Vikarna, Nanda, Upanandaka, Chitrangada, and the Manibhadrakas, protect Bhishma with their respective troops."

Duryodhana's words aimed to inspire confidence and unity among his warriors, highlighting their strength and the formidable protection of Bhishma

Bhishma, Drona, and the Kuru warriors formed a powerful formation to counter the Pandava army. Bhishma, surrounded by a large force, led the charge with the support of the Kuntalas, Dasarnas, Magadhas, Vidarbhas, Melakas, Karnas, and Pravaranas. The Gandharas, Sindhusauviras, Sivis, and Vasatis, along with their respective troops, followed Bhishma, while Sakuni protected him with his forces. King Duryodhana, accompanied by his brothers, the Aswalakas, Vikarnas, Vamanas, Kosalas, Daradas, Vrikas, Kshudrakas, and Malavas, eagerly advanced against the Pandava army.

On the left flank, Bhurisravas, Sala, Salya, Bhagadatta, Vinda, and Anuvinda of Avanti positioned themselves. Somadatta, Susarman, Sudakshina, the ruler of the Kamvojas, Satayus, and Srutayus took their place on the right flank. Aswatthaman, Kripa, Kritavarman of Satwata's lineage, along with a large division of troops, stationed themselves at the rear of the army. Many provincial rulers, Ketumat, Vasudana, and the powerful son of the king of Kasi, stood behind them.

The Kuru warriors, filled with enthusiasm, blew their conches with joy and roared like lions, creating a tumultuous sound. Hearing their shouts, the venerable Kuru grandsire, possessed of great prowess, let out a lion-like roar and blew his conch. In response, other warriors on the Kuru side also blew their conches, drums, Pesis, and cymbals simultaneously, creating a deafening noise.

Madhava (Krishna) and Arjuna, standing together on a magnificent chariot drawn by white steeds, blew their excellent conches adorned with gold and jewels. Hrishikesa (Krishna) blew the conch named Panchajanya, while Dhananjaya (Arjuna) blew the conch called Devadatta. The mighty Vrikodara (Bhima)

sounded the colossal Paundra conch, and King Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, blew the Anantavijaya conch. Nakula and Sahadeva blew the Sughosa and Manipushpaka conches, respectively. The ruler of Kasi, Saivya, Sikhandin, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, Satyaki, and the king of the Panchalas, a great archer, along with the five sons of Draupadi, all blew their mighty conches and roared like lions. The resounding uproar created by these heroic warriors echoed through the earth and the sky.

Filled with delight, both the Kurus and the Pandavas advanced against each other, ready for battle once again

Chapter 9

The Amazing Encounter between Arjuna and Bhishma

When the divisions were arranged, with each warrior clad in armor and their majestic standards raised high, Duryodhana, positioned within the vast Kuru host, urged the combatants to initiate the fight, exclaiming, "Clad in mail, begin the battle!"

Driven by cruel intentions and disregarding their own lives, the warriors on the Kuru side charged forward against the Pandavas, their standards held aloft. The ensuing battle was fierce and terrifying, with chariots and elephants becoming entangled. Deadly arrows, adorned with beautiful feathers and possessing tremendous energy and sharp tips, shot by skilled charioteers, rained down upon the elephants and horses.

In the midst of this conflict, the venerable Kuru patriarch, the mighty-armed Bhishma, clad in armor and wielding his bow, approached the Pandavas. He unleashed a deluge of arrows upon the valiant son of Subhadra (Arjuna), the mighty car-warrior, the ruler of the Kekayas, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, and the warriors from the Chedi and Matsya kingdoms. The Pandava formation faltered under the impact of Bhishma's onslaught, and there was a fierce clash between the combatants. Horses, chariots, and the finest of steeds fell rapidly, and the Pandava divisions began to retreat.

Observing this, Arjuna, the exceptional warrior, angrily addressed Krishna, saying that it was clear Bhishma, fueled by anger, would annihilate their forces for Duryodhana's advantage. Arjuna expressed his intent to confront Bhishma in order to protect their troops and pleaded with Krishna to take him to the grandsire's chariot.

In response, Lord Krishna assured Arjuna, "Be cautious, Dhananjaya, for I will now take you to the grandsire's chariot, O hero."

With these words spoken, Lord Krishna, renowned throughout the world, ascended that magnificent chariot, adorned with fluttering banners and pulled by handsome steeds resembling a flock of white cranes. The standard on the chariot, bearing the roaring image of an ape, rose high, while its resounding rattle echoed like the thunderous roar of clouds. Swiftly, Arjuna, enhancing the joy of his friends, rushed towards the battlefield, slaying the divisions of the Kauravas and the Surasenas.

In his radiant chariot, he confronted Bhishma, the son of Santanu, like an enraged elephant charging ahead, instilling fear in brave warriors and striking them down with his arrows. Bhishma, protected by warriors led by Saindhava, the fighters from the East, Sauviras, and Kekayas, met Arjuna with great force. For who else, apart from the Kuru grandsire and the skilled charioteers Drona and Karna, could face the wielder of the Gandiva bow in battle?

Bhishma, the venerable patriarch of the Kauravas, targeted Arjuna with seventy-seven arrows, while Drona struck him with twenty-five, Kripa with fifty, Duryodhana with sixty-four, and Salya with nine. Drona's valiant son, the tiger among men, pierced him with sixty arrows, Vikarna with three, Saindhava with nine, and Sakuni with five. Arjuna, the diadem-decked warrior of immeasurable soul, remained unshaken even as he

was pierced from all sides, resembling an unperturbed mountain pierced by arrows.

In return, the mighty-armed Arjuna unleashed his own assault, piercing Bhishma with twenty-five arrows, Kripa with nine, Drona with sixty, Vikarna with three, Artayani with three, and the king Duryodhana with five arrows.

Witnessing this intense battle, Satyaki, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, the sons of Draupadi, and Abhimanyu all rallied around Arjuna, providing support. The prince of the Panchalas, backed by the Somakas, approached the great archer Drona, who was dedicated to the well-being of Bhishma.

Observing Arjuna's valiant display, Bhishma, the foremost charioteer, swiftly shot eighty sharp arrows at the son of Pandu, delighting the warriors on his side. Upon hearing the resounding roars of those lion-like heroes, Arjuna, endowed with great prowess, fearlessly entered the midst of those mighty charioteers and engaged in a playful exhibition of his archery skills.

Amidst the battle, King Duryodhana, witnessing the devastation caused by Arjuna to his own troops, spoke to Bhishma, saying that despite the presence of Bhishma and the skilled warrior Drona, Arjuna, accompanied by Krishna, continued to cut down their forces and weaken their position. He urged Bhishma to take the necessary action to slay Arjuna, for Karna, who was loyal to Duryodhana, refrained from fighting against the sons of Pandu despite his capabilities.

Upon hearing the disrespectful words, the illustrious Bhishma, known as Devavrata, grumbled in displeasure and made his way towards Arjuna's chariot. The kings, witnessing the confrontation between these two warriors with white steeds adorning their chariots, roared like lions and blew their conches in anticipation of the battle. Drona's son, Duryodhana, and Vikarna, joining Bhishma, stood around him, ready for combat.

Similarly, all the Pandavas surrounded Arjuna, prepared for a fierce conflict. Thus, the battle commenced.

Bhishma, the son of Ganga, pierced Arjuna with nine arrows, and in return, Arjuna struck him with ten arrows that found their mark. Pandu's son, renowned for his battle prowess, then enveloped Bhishma from all sides with a thousand well-aimed arrows. However, the son of Santanu, Bhishma, countered Arjuna's arrowy net with a net of his own. Both warriors, pleased and eager for battle, fought fiercely, each trying to neutralize the other's feats but unable to gain an advantage.

The flights of arrows unleashed from Bhishma's bow were seen to be dispersed by Arjuna's shafts, while Arjuna's arrows were cut off by Ganga's son and fell to the ground. Arjuna pierced Bhishma with twenty-five sharp arrows, and in return, Bhishma struck him with nine arrows. These two mighty warriors, adversaries of their foes, targeted each other's steeds, chariot wheels, and shafts, engaging in a playful contest. Bhishma, the foremost smiter, then aimed three arrows at Vasudeva's chest, and the slayer of Madhu, struck by those arrows, appeared radiant in battle like a blooming Kinsuka tree.

Infuriated by the sight of Madhava (Krishna) being struck, Arjuna retaliated by piercing Bhishma's charioteer with three arrows. Both heroes, striving against each other, found it difficult to aim directly at their opponent amidst the constant movement and skillful maneuvering of their charioteers. They changed positions frequently, seizing opportunities to strike and attempting to outmaneuver each other. They blew their conches, the sound mingling with their lion-like roars. The resounding echoes of their conches and the rattling of their chariot wheels caused the earth to tremble, accompanied by subterranean rumblings. No flaw or weakness could be discerned in either of them. Both possessed immense strength and courage, and they were evenly matched. The Kauravas sought Bhishma's support merely by seeing his standard, while the Pandavas rallied behind Arjuna, guided by his standard alone.

Witnessing the incredible display of prowess by these two remarkable warriors, all creatures present on the battlefield were filled with awe and wonder. No distinction could be observed between them, just as one cannot find fault in a person who upholds morality. Clouds of arrows at times rendered both of them perfectly invisible, only to become visible again in the midst of the battle.

The gods, Gandharvas, and Charanas, along with the great Rishis, beholding the extraordinary prowess of Bhishma and Arjuna, exclaimed to one another, "These mighty chariot warriors, when filled with rage, cannot be defeated in battle by anyone in all the worlds, including gods, Asuras, and Gandharvas. This battle, so remarkably extraordinary, will be talked about in all realms. Such a battle will never occur again. Bhishma, with his bow, chariot, and horses, cannot be conquered by Pritha's intelligent son, who showers arrows in battle. Similarly, that great archer, the son of Pandu, who cannot be vanquished by even the gods in combat, is not capable of conquering Bhishma. This battle will continue without conclusion for as long as the world itself exists."

These words praising the prowess of both Bhishma and Arjuna were heard echoing throughout the battlefield. While these two warriors displayed their exceptional skills, other fighters on both sides, from the Kuru army and the Pandavas, engaged in the relentless slaughter of one another using sharp scimitars, polished battle-axes, countless arrows, and various other weapons. The brave combatants from both armies fell by each other's hands during this brutal and deadly conflict. The encounter between Drona and the prince of the Panchalas, in particular, was fierce and awe-inspiring.

Chapter 10

Bhima Slays an Entire Army

In the midst of the battle, Drona, with his diverse arrows, pierced Dhrishtadyumna and caused the latter's charioteer to fall from his position in the chariot. The enraged Drona also struck Dhrishtadyumna's four steeds with four excellent arrows. In retaliation, the valiant Dhrishtadyumna pierced Drona with nine sharp arrows and addressed him, saying, "Wait, wait!"

Bharadwaja's son, filled with wrath, covered Dhrishtadyumna with his arrows. He then took up a dreadful arrow, resembling the destructive power of Indra's thunderbolt, to strike down Prishata's son. The sight of that arrow aimed by Bharadwaja caused cries of distress and concern among the combatants. However, Dhrishtadyumna displayed his remarkable prowess by cutting off that terrible and blazing arrow, and he showered a rain of arrows upon Bharadwaja's son.

Witnessing this remarkable feat achieved by Dhrishtadyumna, the Panchalas and Pandavas erupted in joyous shouts. The prince, displaying great strength and determination, desired to slay Drona and hurled a golden-dart with great force toward him. However, the son of Bharadwaja calmly cut the dart, adorned with gold and lapis lazuli, into three fragments. Undeterred, Dhrishtadyumna unleashed a downpour of arrows upon Drona, who skillfully evaded them. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Drona severed Drupada's son's bow. In response, the mighty warrior hurled a heavy mace at Drona, possessing the strength of a mountain. The mace, released from his hands, sped through the air to strike Drona, but Bharadwaja's son skillfully evaded it, and in turn, he shot numerous sharp-edged arrows, with golden wings and sharpened on stone, at Prishata's son. These arrows pierced through Prishata's armor, drawing blood in the heat of battle.

Undeterred, Dhrishtadyumna swiftly picked up another bow and unleashed his prowess by piercing Drona with five arrows. Both warriors, drenched in blood, appeared majestic like blossoming Kinsuka flowers adorned with various colors in spring. Filled with anger, Drona, leading his division, once again severed the bow of Drupada's son. The immeasurably powerful Drona then showered innumerable straight arrows upon the disarmed warrior, resembling rain falling upon a mountain. Drona also struck down Dhrishtadyumna's charioteer from his position and brought down his four steeds with four sharp arrows, causing a thunderous roar. With another arrow, he cut the leather protection covering Dhrishtadyumna's hand. Bereft of his bow,

his chariot destroyed, his steeds slain, and his charioteer overthrown, the prince of Panchala descended from his chariot, wielding a mace and displaying great prowess. However, before he could touch the ground, Drona, with his arrows, shattered the mace into fragments. This extraordinary feat filled us with wonder.

And then, like a hungry lion charging at an enraged elephant in the forest, the mighty prince of the Panchalas, armed with a large shield adorned with a hundred moons and a beautifully crafted scimitar, rushed with fervor to slay Drona. We witnessed the astonishing prowess of Bharadwaja's son, his lightning-fast movements with weapons, and the strength of his arms as he single-handedly fended off Prishata's son with a relentless shower of arrows. Despite his great might in battle, Dhrishtadyumna found himself unable to advance any further. With awe, we beheld the mighty car-warrior, standing his ground and skillfully deflecting the onslaught of arrows with his shield, exhibiting remarkable dexterity.

In the midst of this clash, the mighty-armed Bhima, filled with immense strength, swiftly arrived on the scene, eager to assist the valiant son of Prishata in battle. He pierced Drona with seven sharp arrows, causing Prishata's son to be swiftly transferred onto another chariot. Witnessing this, King Duryodhana ordered the ruler of the Kalingas, supported by a large division, to protect Bharadwaja's son. At Duryodhana's command, the terrible and formidable Kalinga army rushed towards Bhima. Meanwhile, Drona, the foremost chariot warrior, abandoned the prince of Panchala and engaged Virata and Drupada together in combat. Dhrishtadyumna, on the other hand, moved forward to support King Yudhishthira on the battlefield. Thus, a fierce, hair-raising battle ensued between the Kalingas and the mighty Bhima, a battle that threatened the very fabric of the universe, filled with terror and awe.

The mighty king of the Kalingas led his vast army towards Bhima's chariot, supported by the Chedis. Bhimasena charged headlong into the midst of the massive and formidable Kalinga army, which consisted of numerous chariots, steeds, and elephants, as well as formidable warriors wielding powerful weapons. With Ketumat, the son of the king of the Nishadas, leading the charge, Srutayus, donned in armor and accompanied by his troops, arrived before Bhima in battle. The ruler of the Kalingas, along with thousands of chariots, and Ketumat, commanding ten thousand elephants, joined forces with the Nishadas, encircling Bhimasena from all directions. In response, the Chedis, Matsyas, and Karushas, with Bhima at their forefront, rallied together and fiercely clashed with the Nishadas. Thus, a battle ensued between the warriors, driven by the thirst for slaughter, resembling the epic confrontation between Indra and the mighty army of Diti's sons. The deafening uproar of that mighty army engaged in the battle echoed like the roaring ocean, and the combatants slashing at each other turned the entire field into a macabre crematorium adorned with flesh and blood. Driven by their bloodlust, these brave warriors struggled to discern friend from foe, resulting in some inadvertently striking down their own comrades. The collision between the outnumbered Chedis and the overwhelming force of the Kalingas and Nishadas was fierce and terrifying. Displaying their courage to the fullest extent, the mighty Chedis, abandoning Bhimasena, retreated, leaving him to confront the entire Kalinga army, relying solely on the might of his own arms.

In the heat of the battle, Bhimasena stood firm, unleashing a relentless barrage of sharp arrows upon the Kalinga division from the safety of his chariot's terrace. The mighty king of the Kalingas and his warrior son, Sakradeva, retaliated, raining down arrows upon Pandu's son. Bhima, his strong arms gripping the beautiful bow, relied on his own might as he clashed with the Kalinga warriors. Sakradeva's arrows found their mark, piercing Bhimasena's steeds and felling them to the ground.

With his chariot disabled, Bhima faced the oncoming onslaught of Sakradeva, who unleashed a torrent of arrows upon him. Like a deluge following the departure of summer, Sakradeva's arrows poured down upon the valiant Bhima.

Yet, undeterred by the loss of his steeds, Bhimasena brandished his iron mace and hurled it at Sakradeva. The force of the blow proved fatal, causing the son of the Kalinga ruler to fall from his chariot, accompanied by his standard and charioteer, lifeless upon the ground. Witnessing the demise of his own son, the enraged king of the Kalingas encircled Bhima with a multitude of chariots. Undeterred by the circumstances, the mighty-armed Bhima, abandoning his mace, grasped a formidable sword, his heart aflame with a fierce determination. He also seized golden crescents, ready to achieve a fearsome feat.

The wrathful ruler of the Kalingas, rubbing his bowstring, aimed a venomous arrow, deadly as the poison of a snake, at Bhimasena, seeking to slay the Pandava prince. However, Bhima swiftly sliced the arrow in twain with his colossal sword, filling himself with delight and emitting a thunderous shout that sent waves of terror through the enemy ranks. Infuriated by the engagement with Bhimasena, the king of the Kalingas swiftly hurled fourteen sharp and barbed darts, honed to a razor's edge. Yet, the mighty-armed son of Pandu fearlessly shattered those darts into fragments before they could reach him, wielding his magnificent scimitar with unrivaled skill.

Having thwarted the onslaught of the fourteen darts, Bhima, that indomitable warrior, set his sights upon Bhanumat and charged towards him. Bhanumat unleashed a torrent of arrows upon Bhima, accompanied by a roar that resonated throughout the sky. But Bhima, undeterred by the ferocity of his opponent, bellowed with a thunderous voice that sent tremors through the Kalinga army. Gripped by fear, they ceased to perceive Bhima as a mere mortal, for his roar echoed with the might of a raging beast.

With a resounding cry, Bhima leaped upon Bhanumat's magnificent elephant, utilizing the creature's tusks to propel himself onto its back. With his massive sword raised high, Bhima swiftly cleaved Bhanumat in two, dividing him in the middle. Having vanquished the prince of the Kalingas in battle, Bhima then directed his formidable sword towards the elephant's neck, severing the mighty beast's head. With a deafening roar, the majestic elephant crashed to the ground, resembling a mountain summit devoured by the relentless assault of the sea

Leaping down from the fallen elephant, the undaunted prince of Bharata's lineage stood firmly on the ground, clad in his armor and wielding his trusty sword. With each swing, he felled numerous elephants that dared to challenge him, carving new paths amidst the chaos of the battlefield. He became a whirlwind of destruction, akin to a blazing wheel of fire, decimating cavalry, elephants, chariots, and infantry alike.

Like a hawk in motion, Bhima, the mighty lord among men, traversed the field with astonishing agility. With his razor-sharp sword, he severed bodies and heads of his foes, be they mounted on elephants or standing on foot. He struck terror into their hearts, confounding even the bravest warriors. Only the foolhardy would rush at him with boisterous shouts, for Bhimasena roamed the great battle, his sword ready to claim more victims. He cut through arrows and chariot yokes, slaying the warriors who dared to challenge him. His movements were a spectacle to behold—spinning, leaping, thrusting, and sprinting, he demonstrated his prowess in various forms.

The valiant son of Pandu wielded his excellent sword, leaving a trail of mangled bodies in his wake. Some victims shrieked as their vitals were pierced, while others fell lifeless to the ground. The elephants, their trunks and tusks severed, their temporal lobes exposed, rampaged within their own ranks, trampling their fellow soldiers and bellowing in agony. The field was littered

with broken lances, severed elephant driver heads, ornate harnesses, gleaming gold-adorned bows, quivers, and an assortment of weapons and equipment. The ground resembled a battlefield strewn with fallen cliffs.

Having crushed the mighty elephants, Bhimasena turned his attention to the steeds, swiftly bringing them down. He then set his sights on the foremost cavalry soldiers, engaging in a fierce and relentless clash. Golden-hilted swords, shining armor, shields, and precious ornaments were scattered across the battlefield, mingling with the crimson hues of spilled blood. Bhima painted the earth with a tapestry of carnage, as if it were adorned with lilies dyed in crimson.

With his incredible strength and agility, the son of Pandu leapt high into the air, using his sword to drag down chariot warriors along with their proud standards. He bounded from one location to another, surprising and bewildering his opponents with his unmatched dexterity. Some he dispatched with his legs, while others he crushed beneath the weight of his powerful frame. He severed limbs with his sword and terrified his foes with thunderous roars. Some unfortunate souls were thrown to the ground by the force of his thundering thighs as he sprinted by. Those who witnessed his prowess were filled with terror, while others fled in sheer panic. The vast force of the Kalingas, engulfing Bhimasena with their relentless assault, charged at him, driven by their unyielding determination.

In that tumultuous battle, the earth became a canvas painted with blood, resembling a field adorned with vibrant lilies. Bhima, the formidable warrior, leaped and tumbled, dragging down charioteers with his sword and crushing them along with their proud banners. His boundless energy propelled him in every direction, leaving his enemies astounded. Some met their demise at the crushing weight of his legs, while others were overwhelmed by the sheer force of his sword. His thunderous roars sent shivers down their spines, and those who dared to stand against him were swiftly subdued. This was the sight that

unfolded as the formidable army of the Kalingas, full of vigor, closed in around the fearsome Bhimasena, determined to bring him down.

Then, catching sight of Srutayush leading the Kalinga troops, Bhimasena charged forward. The ruler of the Kalingas, with his boundless spirit, pierced Bhimasena between the breasts with a volley of nine arrows. The impact of those arrows struck Bhimasena like an enraged elephant prodded by a sharp hook, igniting a fiery wrath within him. Vishoka, the skilled charioteer, swiftly brought forth a golden-adorned chariot for Bhima to mount. The slayer of foes, the valiant son of Kunti, wasted no time and climbed onto the chariot. With determination in his eyes, he sped towards the ruler of the Kalingas, shouting, "Wait, wait!"

Srutayush, filled with fury, responded by unleashing a barrage of sharp arrows, showcasing his prowess. Yet, the mighty warrior Bhima, struck by those nine arrows from Kalinga's ruler, only grew angrier, much like a serpent lashed with a rod. In retaliation, the formidable Bhima, his rage fueling his strength, drew his bow and unleashed seven iron-tipped shafts, taking the life of the ruler of the Kalingas. He also swiftly dispatched the two fierce protectors of Kalinga's chariot wheels, Satyadeva and Satya, to the abode of Yama, the lord of death.

The enraged Kalinga warriors, supported by countless combatants, rushed forward to confront the wrathful Bhimasena. Armed with darts, maces, scimitars, lances, swords, and battle-axes, the Kalingas encircled Bhimasena, numbering in the hundreds. But the mighty warrior, defying the onslaught of arrows, grasped his mace and leaped down from his chariot with lightning speed. In this battle, Bhima sent seven hundred heroes to the realm of Yama, the god of death, and an additional two thousand Kalinga warriors met the same fate. It was a feat that left witnesses in awe.

The fierce Bhima repeatedly decimated large groups of Kalinga fighters with his terrifying prowess. Elephants, bereft of their riders by Pandu's son, roamed the field, trampling their own comrades, their trumpeting cries resembling thunderous storm clouds. Delighted with his triumph, the mighty-armed Bhima, wielding his scimitar, let out a resounding blast from his fearsome conch. The deafening sound struck fear into the hearts of the Kalinga troops, leaving them disoriented. The combatants and animals alike trembled with terror, overwhelmed by the presence of Bhimasena. As Bhima traversed the battlefield, employing various tactics, jumping, and charging like a royal elephant, his opponents were plunged into a trance-like state, their senses rendered useless. The entire Kalinga army quivered with fear in the face of Bhimasena, resembling a vast lake stirred by the presence of a ferocious alligator. The Kalinga combatants, struck with panic by Bhima's extraordinary achievements, scattered in all directions, fleeing for their lives.

But when the Pandava army, rallied by their commander Dhrishtadyumna, heard his command to fight, they surged forward. Led by Sikhandin and supported by skilled charioteers, many leaders of the Pandava forces joined Bhima. King Yudhishthira, mounted on a massive elephant force as dark as storm clouds, followed closely behind. Surrounded by formidable warriors, Dhrishtadyumna, the son of Prishata, took charge of protecting one of Bhimasena's wings.

There is no one on earth, except Bhima and Satyaki, who is dearer to the prince of Panchalas than his own life. As the slayer of enemy heroes, Dhrishtadyumna, caught sight of Bhimasena, wandering amidst the Kalingas, he raised triumphant shouts and brimmed with joy. In the midst of battle, he blew his conch and let out a resounding lion-like roar. Bhimasena, too, caught sight of Dhrishtadyumna's red standard, adorned with golden-decked chariot and steeds as white as doves, which brought him comfort.

The immeasurable-souled Dhrishtadyumna, seeing Bhimasena surrounded by the Kalingas, rushed to his rescue. The two heroes, Dhrishtadyumna and Vrikodara, both possessed of great energy, fiercely engaged the Kalingas in battle. The grandson of Sini, the foremost of victorious warriors, quickly advanced to join Bhima and Prishata's son on the battlefield. With bow in hand, wreaking havoc and exuding an extreme ferocity, he began slaying the enemy forces. Bhima caused a river of blood to flow, mingled with the flesh and blood of the Kalinga warriors.

Witnessing Bhimasena's might, the troops cried out, declaring, "It is Death himself fighting in the form of Bhima against the Kalingas."

Upon hearing those cries, Bhishma, the son of Santanu, hastened towards Bhima, surrounded by his own army. Satyaki, Bhimasena, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage swiftly approached Bhima's golden-adorned chariot. They encircled Bhishma on the battlefield and, without wasting a moment, each pierced him with three formidable arrows. However, the Grandsire Devavrata retaliated by piercing each of those mighty archers, who were fiercely battling, with three straight arrows. In his assault, Bhishma skillfully slew the steeds of Bhima, adorned with golden armor, with a barrage of his arrows. Undeterred, Bhimasena, with his immense strength, leaped down from the chariot, wielding a heavy and mighty mace forged from Saikya iron. Dhrishtadyumna swiftly took Bhishma onto his own chariot, snatching away the renowned warrior right before the eyes of all the combatants. Satyaki, eager to please Bhima, struck down the charioteer of the venerable Kuru grandsire with his arrow. With his charioteer slain, the formidable car-warrior Bhishma was carried away from the battlefield by his steeds with the speed of the wind. As Bhishma was taken away from the fray, Bhimasena blazed like a raging fire, consuming dry grass. Slaying every Kalinga warrior in his path, he stood amidst the troops, and none dared to challenge him

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Bhima, hailed and revered by the Panchalas and the Matsyas, embraced Dhrishtadyumna and approached Satyaki.

Satyaki, the untamed lion among the Yadus, possessing unmatched prowess, pleased Bhimasena with his words in the presence of Dhrishtadyumna. "By good fortune, the king of the Kalingas, Ketumat, the prince of the Kalingas, and even Sakradeva, along with all the Kalingas, have been vanquished in battle. It is through the might and strength of your arms alone, that the formidable Kalinga division, teeming with elephants, steeds, chariots, and valiant warriors, has been crushed."

Having spoken these words, the long-armed descendant of Sini, the punisher of foes, swiftly ascended his chariot and embraced the son of Pandu. Then, returning to his own chariot, that mighty warrior unleashed a storm of destruction upon your troops, fueling Bhima's fury with his valor

Chapter 11

Arjuna shows his true prowess

As the morning of that fateful day faded away and the battlefield became a maelstrom of shattered chariots, fallen elephants, and trampled soldiers, the prince of Panchala, driven by his indomitable spirit, clashed with three formidable chariot warriors: Drona's son, Salya, and the valiant Kripa. With his expert aim and deadly arrows, the mighty scion of Panchala

slew the renowned steeds of Drona's son, the equine pride of the entire world. Deprived of his loyal companions, Drona's son swiftly leapt onto Salya's chariot, raining down a deluge of arrows upon the heroic locks of the Panchala king.

Witnessing Dhrishtadyumna locked in combat with Drona's son, Arjuna's son, the courageous offspring of Subhadra, swiftly approached, unleashing a flurry of razor-sharp arrows. He pierced Salya with twenty-five arrows, Kripa with nine, and Aswatthaman with eight. In response, Drona's son swiftly pierced Arjuna's son with a volley of winged arrows, while Salya planted twelve arrows into his valiant frame, and Kripa added three more to the tally. Fuelled by fury, Lakshmana, the son of Duryodhana, charged at Subhadra's son, determined to exact revenge. A fierce clash ensued between them, with the battlefield quaking under their relentless assault. The son of Duryodhana, consumed by rage, unleashed a barrage of sharp shafts that found their mark on Subhadra's son. The crowd marveled at this spectacle, for it was truly a sight to behold.

But the nimble-handed Abhimanyu, ignited by his own wrath, swiftly retaliated, piercing his cousin with a relentless hail of five hundred arrows. Undeterred, Lakshmana severed his cousin's bowstaff in the middle, causing the assembled onlookers to erupt in a resounding cheer. Undeterred by this setback, the slayer of formidable foes, Subhadra's son, cast aside the broken bow and seized another, beautiful and unyielding. Thus, the two warriors, each a formidable bull among men, engaged in a desperate duel, their aim to outshine one another on this blood-soaked stage. With each clash of their weapons, they exchanged piercing shafts, their determination unwavering.

Observing his mighty son being assailed by thy grandson, Duryodhana himself rushed to the scene. In response, a multitude of kings converged upon Arjuna's son from all sides, encircling him with a swarm of chariots. But this hero, invincible in battle and matched only by Krishna in prowess,

remained unshaken in the face of overwhelming odds, his resolve unyielding.

As Subhadra's son fought valiantly on the battlefield, Arjuna, filled with rage, rushed to his son's aid, determined to rescue his own flesh and blood. The Kuru side, led by mighty warriors like Bhishma and Drona, charged forth with their formidable chariots, elephants, and steeds, aiming to subdue the legendary archer, Savyasachin. A dense cloud of dust, kicked up by the marching soldiers, galloping horses, rumbling chariots, and charging cavalry, enveloped the sky, obscuring all sight. The deafening cries of thousands of elephants and the approaching kings resonated through the air, but when they encountered Arjuna's arrows, their advance came to a grinding halt. The entire battlefield became shrouded in darkness, and cries of anguish echoed from all directions. The transgressions of the Kuru warriors took on a fierce and dreadful countenance, as the consequences of their actions unfolded. The sky, the cardinal points, the earth, and even the sun itself became indistinguishable amid the onslaught of Kiritin's arrows. Countless elephants lost their proud standards, and numerous chariot warriors were dismounted from their steeds. Some leaders abandoned their chariots, wandering aimlessly, weapon in hand, their arms adorned with battle cuffs. Riders on horses and elephants fled in fear of Arjuna, leaving their loyal companions behind. Kings fell from chariots, elephants, and steeds, struck down by Arjuna's deadly shafts. With a fierce countenance, Arjuna severed the upraised arms of warriors wielding maces, swords, darts, quivers, shafts, bows, hooks, and standards. The battlefield was littered with shattered spiked maces, broken mallets, bearded darts, short arrows, swords, battle-axes, and shattered shields. Coats of mail, standards, and weapons of all kinds were discarded, along with golden-staffed umbrellas, iron hooks, goads, whips, and traces, creating heaps of discarded remnants. There was no warrior left in the enemy army who dared to face the heroic Arjuna in battle. Any who

dared to confront Pritha's son met their end, pierced by his sharp arrows, sent to the realm beyond. When the remaining combatants broke and fled, Arjuna and Vasudeva sounded their resounding conches, filling the air with their triumphant blast. Observing the routed Kuru host, the wise Devavrata, with a smile on his lips, spoke to the heroic son of Bharadwaja on the battlefield, "This mighty and heroic son of Pandu, Dhananjaya, accompanied by Krishna, is single-handedly decimating our troops. His form today resembles that of the Destroyer himself at the end of the Yuga. Our vast army, on the other hand, is scattered and incapable of being rallied. Look at them fleeing in all directions, their spirits crushed. The sun, obstructing the sight of the entire world, is about to set behind the majestic mountain known as Asta. I believe the time has come to withdraw our forces. Our tired and panicked warriors will never fight." Having conveyed this to Drona, the supreme preceptor, the mighty car-warrior Bhishma ordered the withdrawal of your army. As the sun descended, the armies retreated, and twilight cast its shadow over the land. Thus concludes Day 2 of the Battle of Kurukshetra

Chapter 12

The story of how Bhima slew Jarasandha

Yudhistera sat upon his throne, adorned in a regal robe of deep ruby red, his head crowned with a glimmering golden circlet. Around him stood a cadre of twenty heavily armed guards, all dressed in matching attire. The air within the throne room grew heavy with a somber mood, a sight no one wished to witness, especially considering Yudhistera's lineage as the son of Yamaraj himself. Leaning forward on his throne, his hand resting on his chin, his eyes gleamed with a fiery intensity. He delved deep into contemplation, pondering the intricate details of performing the Rajasurya-Yajna. It was his father, Pandu, who had sent the venerable sage Narada Muni to request this monumental task from him. Yudhistera's appetite waned, sleep eluded him, and even music failed to pacify his restless mind. A smile played on his lips, a smile that seemed to mock all those who had ever dared to challenge his resolve.

Yudhistera was the mastermind, the visionary of the group. His gaze swept across the room, focusing on his brothers.

First, there was Bhima, a colossal figure seated on a throne of gold. His bronze complexion and amber eyes contrasted with his jet-black hair and attire, exuding an aura of strength akin to the very earth itself. Bhima was unwavering, a pillar of dependability, entrusted with managing all internal affairs within the kingdom.

Then there was Arjuna, a charismatic and flirtatious figure, as handsome as the god of love himself. Not only was he unmatched as a military strategist, but he also possessed the ability to conjure up a battle plan at a moment's notice. Arjuna was the face of the empire, and he was often dispatched on diplomatic missions to foreign lands.

Yet, it was Yudhistera who possessed the foresight, the wisdom. As the eldest of the brothers, he was the compass guiding their path. His visions and contemplations delved into realms beyond mortal comprehension. However, the Rajasurya Yajna presented a unique challenge, embodied in the form of Jarasanda.

Jarasanda, the despotic ruler, a tyrant commanding one of the largest armies in the world. How could Yudhistera perform the Rajasurya Yajna while Jarasanda sat upon the throne of Maghada? Engaging in open warfare would risk utter annihilation, as Jarasanda's vast army would surely overwhelm them. Bhima and Arjuna were formidable champions, but Yudhistera couldn't bear the thought of losing even a single one of them.

Yudhistera turned to his last hope, Krishna. Krishna was a political genius, unparalleled in his astuteness. He possessed an innate understanding of policies and diplomacy, seemingly able to read minds before words were even spoken. His voice, deep yet soothing, held an enchanting quality that compelled all who heard it to do his bidding.

As Krishna entered the grand assembly, his presence radiated confidence, resembling a majestic lion. His lotus-like eyes

glanced at the Pandava brothers, a silent acknowledgment passing between them.

Yudhistera, his countenance worn but brightened by Krishna's presence, spoke up, "Oh Lord, who is this Jarasanda, and what power does he possess that he dares stand against you without turning to ashes?"

Krishna's entry into the assembly mirrored that of a regal lion, exuding an air of self-assuredness. His eyes, resembling delicate lotus petals, surveyed the Pandava brothers with a hint of mystery and wisdom

Krishna's response was filled with intensity and determination. His voice resonated with unwavering confidence as he addressed the gathering.

"Once, in the kingdom of Magadha, the mighty King Vrihadratha, though powerful, was plagued by the absence of a son. It was during this time that a wise and formidable sage named Chandakausika arrived. The king humbly served the sage, going to great lengths to please him. Pleased by the king's devotion, the sage offered him a benediction. The king, longing for a son, expressed his desire, and it was then that a mango fell from a tree, an omen of the sage's prophecy. The sage revealed that if the king were to give it to one of his wives, they would bear a son."

Krishna paused, his eyes glimmering with intrigue, as he continued, "However, not wanting to provoke jealousy between his wives, the king cut the mango in half and presented one half to each of them. As a result, each wife gave birth to half a baby. The unfortunate child was abandoned in the woods, only to be discovered by the powerful witch Jara, who skillfully fused the two halves together. Thus, he came to be known as Jarasandha, born from the union of the halves by Jara."

He continued, his voice growing more resolute, "Jarasandha, driven by ambition, has amassed great wealth and power by

continuously serving the Brahmins. His ultimate goal is to offer a sacrifice of 100 kings to Lord Shiva in a grand yajna, seeking to obtain unrivaled power and dominion over the entire world. With the demise of Hamsa and Dimvaka, his formidable warriors, the time to confront Jarasandha has arrived."

Krishna's gaze shifted towards Yudhishthira, who was visibly shaken. With a hint of sympathy, Krishna acknowledged his concerns. "Yudhishthira, dear king, I understand your apprehension. You are the leader of the Pandavas, and it is true that I never abandon those whom Goddess Lakshmi favors. If I assure you that Jarasandha will be defeated, would you then consider him already vanquished and our Rajasuya sacrifice complete? But I understand your reluctance to part with Bhima and Arjuna, who are as dear to you as your own eyes and limbs."

Arjuna, his eyes gleaming with determination, rose from his seat, clad in black armor adorned with intricate gold leaf patterns. With a firm voice, he addressed Yudhishthira, "O king, I have acquired divine weapons, mystic energy, allies, dominions, fame, and strength. These treasures are not easily obtained, no matter how fervently one desires them. In esteemed circles, noble lineage is often lauded. But there is nothing that surpasses might. As a member of a valorous lineage, I find little worth in those devoid of courage. Conversely, one who possesses valor, even if born into a less valorous family, is far superior."

Arjuna's voice grew more impassioned as he continued, "A true Kshatriya is one who augments his fame and possessions by subduing his enemies. A warrior with valor, even lacking other virtues, can conquer his foes. However, someone devoid of valor, despite possessing numerous merits, will achieve little. Valor encompasses all other virtues in its nascent form. Victory is determined by the convergence of focused attention, effort, and destiny. Yet, even one blessed with valor cannot secure success if he acts recklessly. Sometimes, the strong perish due to

carelessness, just as the weak fall victim to insignificance. A king desiring victory should avoid both these pitfalls."

Arjuna's voice resonated with conviction as he addressed Yudhishthira, "If, for the sake of our sacrifice, we strive to defeat Jarasandha and rescue the captive kings, we will be engaged in the highest endeavor. By undertaking this task, we shall dispel any notion of our incompetence held by the world. O king, we are more than capable of accomplishing this feat. Why, then, should you consider us inadequate? Let us face the foe and emerge victorious."

Krishna's face lit up with a broad smile as he clapped his hands in approval. He turned towards Arjuna, his eyes beaming with admiration, and spoke, "Indeed, he is a worthy scion of the Bharata dynasty. He embodies the essence of being born into the Bharata lineage, particularly as the son of Kunti. Death may seize us at any time, be it in the darkest night or under the scorching sun. Immortality is not attained by shying away from challenges. It is the duty of men to confront their enemies according to the principles laid down in the Vedas. Such an act brings contentment to the heart."

Krishna's voice resonated with unwavering determination as he concluded, "With sound strategies and favorable destiny, an endeavor is bound to succeed. If both parties employ these means and engage in battle, one will inevitably triumph over the other. Ours is a battle we can win by employing wise strategies and capitalizing on the enemy's weaknesses. We shall approach the foe covertly, striking at his core, and never shall we face disgrace. The mighty bull among men, Jarasandha, may enjoy enduring glory, but I foresee his downfall. In our endeavor to protect our loved ones, we shall either slay him in battle or ascend to heaven while sacrificing ourselves in the process."

Yudhishthira, after pondering deeply, acknowledged the formidable capabilities of Bhima and Arjuna. He recognized

their strength, wisdom, and luck as essential components for their victory. With conviction, he declared, "What can Bhima and Arjuna not accomplish? However, it is said that an army without a commander is futile, and luck plays a crucial role in all endeavors. With Bhima's strength, Krishna's wise counsel, and Arjuna's fortune, we shall undoubtedly achieve victory."

Encouraged by Yudhishthira's words, Krishna, Arjuna, and Bhima embarked on their journey to Magadha, disguising themselves as Snataka Brahmanas. As they set out, they were showered with blessings and kind words from their friends and relatives. The trio, radiating enthusiasm, had bodies akin to the brilliance of the Sun, Moon, and Fire. Their determination was fueled by the distressing plight of their captive kin. The sight of Krishna and Arjuna, unbeaten warriors in previous battles, accompanied by the indomitable Bhima, instilled confidence in the hearts of the people, who already considered Jarasandha defeated.

Led by Bhima, they traversed the land between the Kuru kingdom and the kingdom of Magadha. They donned the red robes of Snataka Brahmanas, a garb unfamiliar in the Kshatriya class, lending them an aura of powerful Brahmins.

Upon reaching Jarasandha's capital, they encountered a colossal mountain, revered by the city's inhabitants. It was said that Jarasandha's father had slain a mighty Rakshasa and fashioned a massive drum from its hide. The drum was so enormous that its sound resonated for three hours when struck. Following Krishna's guidance, Bhima lifted the drum and shattered it against his knee.

Bhima and Krishna then joined forces to hoist the mountain overhead and hurled its peak into a nearby valley, reducing it to pebbles. This audacious act served as a symbolic gesture, a direct challenge to Jarasandha's might

The city of Jarasanda sprawled with its multitude of roads, towering walls, and fortified towers. Certain roads were reserved exclusively for military personnel, and specific gates allowed their ingress and egress unhindered by common folk. The Trio stood before a gate designated solely for the military, where a guard confronted them, demanding their permission to proceed. Krishna, wearing a knowing smile, continued walking without faltering.

The guard gruffly asked, "Where is your permission?"

Krishna pointed towards the mighty Bhima, whose imposing stature overshadowed the guard. Bhima, with the strength of a bull and a mane of raven-black hair cascading down his lion-like neck, fixed his amber predator-like eyes upon the guard, his countenance stern and his fists clenched.

"He is our permission. If you have any qualms, you can take it up with him," Krishna declared.

Terrified, the guard scurried away, leaving Krishna and Bhima to tear off the formidable iron gates, each claiming one as a token of their audacity.

Unimpeded, Krishna led the way through the bustling streets, where vendors' wares adorned the market. They brazenly helped themselves to various items without paying, their actions dictated by their enmity towards Jarasanda and the need to follow this protocol to enter his city.

Finally, they reached the grand palace of Jarasanda and presented themselves as Brahmins. Dismissing the king's presence, they turned their backs to him, and Krishna proclaimed, "We have taken a vow of silence until midnight. Only then shall we speak to you."

As midnight approached, word reached Jarasanda about the activities of the three Snataka Brahmins. He pondered their

immense strength and audacious deeds, bewildered by their hostility towards his empire.

The mighty king entered their chambers and humbly bowed before them. In a thunderous voice, they simultaneously declared, "May you soon attain liberation." As Jarasanda rose and observed them closely, the spokesman among them stood out with an uncanny hue, somewhat familiar. The others displayed broad muscular chests and necks as sturdy as tree trunks.

Jarasanda responded, "You are welcome... Please, be seated."

The trio settled on the ground, their posture resembling three radiant gods presiding over a blazing sacrificial ceremony. Adorned with stolen flower garlands, smeared with sandalwood paste, and bedecked in the ornaments pilfered from street vendors, they exuded an awe-inspiring presence.

Jarasanda inquired, "I have never heard of Snataka Brahmins wearing garlands and sandalwood paste. Who are you, resembling divine beings, with battle-scarred arms? I have heard of your feats, the tearing of the great mountain and the destruction of the drum. Tell me your purpose, for truth is even a virtue of warriors."

Krishna responded, "Do not be mistaken, O king. The Snataka vow may be undertaken by any of the Dvija classes, and each class observes its own rules and regulations. Furthermore, the warrior class is known for its actions, not its words, unlike the Brahmins. Therefore, our purpose shall be revealed to you through our deeds."

Jarasanda questioned further, "I cannot recall ever causing you harm, so why do you treat me as a foe?"

Krishna spoke with a firm tone, "There is a noble person whom your actions have offended, and it is in his cause that we have ventured to your city. Have you not captured countless kings,

treating them like mere animals for sacrifice? Does this atrocity not ring a bell? Have you not considered that such actions might cause offense?"

Jarasanda scoffed, "I only enslave those whom I have defeated in combat. There is but one rule in this world, and that is might. I am the mightiest, and thus, what I say is as good as religion. None have challenged me and emerged victorious."

Krishna retorted, "Those who are strong shall always encounter someone stronger. Do not become too proud of your heroism, for one who can defeat you may be right at your doorstep."

Jarasanda sneered, "Be it with armies or in single combat against one or even all three of you, I shall not back down. Let us fight this instant."

Krishna replied, "Then you should know that I am Vasudeva, and this is Arjuna and Bhima. Choose whom you wish to fight against."

Jarasanda mocked, "I should have known a coward like you, Krishna, would appear in such attire. I will not fight you or Arjuna, for you are not strong enough. The only one who can provide me with a challenge is Bhima."

On the morning of the holy month of Kartik, Bhima and Jarasanda faced each other in a simple arena outside the city. Clad in nothing but loincloths, they fought bare-chested and bare-legged. They unleashed their bare hands, elbows, knees, and feet in a battle of raw strength.

The fight commenced, capturing the attention of a massive crowd that had gathered from far and wide. The onlookers were packed so tightly that the distinction between individuals blurred, forming a colossal mass of flesh. Some climbed upon the backs of elephants for a better view, while others perched atop chariots, horses, or the shoulders of their friends.

Bhima and Jarasanda clashed with such ferocity that even amidst the bustling city, their blows resonated above the general cacophony. Each strike sounded like the splitting of rocks or the crash of lightning bolts.

For a grueling span of fifteen days, they fought as true warriors, engaging in a relentless display of punches, kicks, and wrestling maneuvers. Both were paragons of strength, finding joy in the battle. The fighting persisted throughout the day, and at night, Jarasanda hosted his adversaries, ensuring their nourishment and lodging.

On the fifteenth day, Krishna, desiring a swift end to the conflict, caught Bhima's attention with a wave of his hand and then split a leaf. Such was their synchrony that this gesture conveyed a message to Bhima—he realized that Jarasanda possessed a vulnerability in his midsection, urging him to strike there.

Bhima seized Jarasanda, forcefully slamming him to the ground. Placing both feet on one leg, he gripped the other with his hand and, summoning every ounce of his might, emitted a leonine roar that blended with Jarasanda's death knell. Mighty Bhima split Jarasanda down the middle, spilling his guts and internal organs onto the ground.

This deed unfolded under the watchful gaze of Sri Krishna, who delighted in such heroic feats. But when his pure devotees performed great feats to please him, his enjoyment surpassed even his own acts of valor. Such was the satisfaction Krishna experienced as Bhima accomplished this remarkable service.

As recounted by Mhadvacarya, Krishna relished these acts of devotion, for when his devoted Bhaktas performed extraordinary feats for his pleasure, his joy knew no bounds.

Chapter 13

Dawn of the Third day of Battle

As the night gave way to dawn, Bhishma, the son of Santanu and the bane of his foes, issued the command for the Kuru army to prepare for battle. With the desire for victory burning in his heart for his sons, the aged Kuru patriarch formed a formidable formation known as Garuda, the mythical eagle. And perched upon the beak of this mighty Garuda was none other than Devavrata himself, while Bharadwaja's son and Kritavarman of Satwata's lineage served as its piercing eyes. Alongside them stood the renowned warriors Aswatthaman and Kripa, bolstered by the Trigartas, the Matsyas, the Kekayas, and the Vatadhanas, all forming the head of the formation.

Bhurisravas, Sala, Salya, Bhagadatta, and the Madrakas, along with the Sindhu-Souviras and the Pancha-nodas, accompanied by Jayadratha, took their positions upon its towering neck. King

Duryodhana, supported by his faithful followers, occupied the back of this awe-inspiring formation. Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, along with the Kamvojas and the Sakas, formed its menacing tail, while the Magadhas, Kalingas, and tribes of the Daserakas, adorned in armor, constituted the formidable right wing. The Karushas, the Vikunjas, the Mundas, and the Kaundivrishas, led by Vrithadvala, took their stand on the left wing.

Observing this battle-ready host arrayed before him, Arjuna, the valiant wielder of both bows, aided by Dhrishtadyumna, skillfully organized his troops in a counter-array. In response to your array, Arjuna fashioned a fierce formation resembling the crescent moon. Positioned at the right horn stood Bhimasena, radiating strength, surrounded by kings from diverse realms, armed with a myriad of weapons. Virata and Drupada flanked him, followed by Nila, wielding venomous arms. Dhrishtaketu, encircled by the Chedis, the Kasis, the Karushas, and the Pauravas, occupied the next position. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandin, the Panchalas, and the Prabhadrakas, reinforced by other troops, stood firm in the center, prepared for battle. King Yudhishthira, the embodiment of righteousness, was stationed there with his division of elephants. Satyaki and the five sons of Draupadi positioned themselves next to him, while Iravan took his place beside them. Ghatotkacha, Bhimasena's mighty son, and the formidable warriors of the Kekaya lineage were also present. And on the left horn of this magnificent formation, the greatest of men, Arjuna, the protector of the universe, stood alongside his guardian, Janardana. It was in this manner that the Pandavas established their formidable counter-array, determined to bring about the destruction of your sons and their supporters.

Thus commenced the clash between your forces and the foe's, with warriors striking each other amidst the chaos, chariots and elephants entangled in the maelstrom of combat. A multitude of elephants and an array of chariots charged at one another, seeking the thrill of slaughter. The resounding clash of innumerable chariots and the thunderous beat of drums

reverberated through the air, blending with the clamor of the heroic combatants from both armies as they relentlessly slaughtered each other, their deafening cries reaching the very heavens above.

With the armies positioned in battle formation, the mighty warrior Arjuna, known as Dhananjaya, unleashed a torrent of arrows that felled the leaders of chariot divisions, causing a great massacre within the ranks of the enemy. Like the Destroyer himself at the end of the Yuga, he relentlessly fought, determined to achieve glorious victory, making death the only respite from the battle. The Dhartarashtras, despite being slaughtered by Pritha's son, continued to fight valiantly against the Pandavas. Their minds focused solely on the desire for glory, and they clashed with unwavering determination, breaking the Pandava formations in numerous places, yet also suffering their own losses.

The battlefield became a chaotic blur as the Pandava and Kaurava troops clashed, constantly shifting positions and engaging in relentless combat. The swirling dust kicked up by the tumultuous conflict veiled the sun itself, obscuring all sense of direction. The combatants fought guided by colors, watchwords, names, and tribal distinctions. The formidable array of the Kauravas, protected by Bharadwaja's son, remained unbroken, while the Pandava formation, guarded by Savyasachin and the indomitable Bhima, stood firm against all assaults.

Cavalry soldiers fell cavalry soldiers, their swords gleaming with sharp edges and their lances striking true. Chariot warriors targeted their counterparts, felling them with arrows adorned with golden wings. Elephant riders from both sides unleashed a rain of broad-headed shafts, arrows, and lances, bringing down their fellow riders in close ranks. Infuriated infantry clashed fiercely, wielding short arrows and battle-axes, cutting down

their counterparts within their own ranks. Car warriors took down elephant riders, and elephant riders returned the favor. The cavalry thrust their lances into the chariot warriors, who retaliated in kind. Foot soldiers battled each other, while horse-riders trampled warriors on the backs of elephants. The spectacle was nothing short of astonishing.

Throughout the battlefield, foot soldiers were felled by skilled elephant riders, and in turn, these riders were brought down by their ground-bound adversaries. Bands of foot soldiers, numbering in the hundreds and thousands, were cut down by mounted horsemen, while these riders, in their turn, fell beneath the blades of the infantry. The ground was strewn with shattered standards, broken bows, trampled lances, discarded elephant housings, and the remnants of costly blankets. Bearded darts, maces, spiked clubs, Kampanas, and variegated coats of mail littered the field. The air was filled with the clash of weapons—polished scimitars, shafts with golden wings, and deadly Kunapas. The battlefield shimmered as if adorned with floral wreaths.

The earth, drenched in blood and besmirched with flesh, became an impassable quagmire of fallen bodies—men, horses, and elephants—lay in gruesome heaps. The soil, saturated with human lifeblood, absorbed it all, and the dust settled, revealing the cardinal points once again. Headless trunks rose up, a ghastly testament to the devastation wrought upon the world. In the midst of this terrible and awe-inspiring battle, chariot warriors were seen fleeing in every direction, seeking refuge from the relentless slaughter.

Purumitra, Vikarna, and Sakuni, renowned warriors possessing unmatched prowess on the battlefield, broke through the ranks of the Pandavas, striking fear into their hearts. In response, Bhimasena, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, Satyaki, Chekitana, and the sons of Draupadi, supported by a coalition of kings,

unleashed their might upon the Kuru forces. They ground their adversaries with a relentless onslaught, akin to the gods crushing the Danavas. These mighty Kshatriyas clashed in battle, their fierce encounters transforming them into fearsome spectacles, their bodies drenched in blood shining like Kinsukas flowers. The foremost warriors from both armies, overcoming their opponents, radiated a celestial glow, reminiscent of celestial luminaries adorning the sky.

Meanwhile, your son Duryodhana, bolstered by a formidable force of a thousand chariots, charged into battle against the Pandavas and the Rakshasa warriors. The Pandavas, accompanied by a multitude of valiant fighters, confronted the indomitable Bhishma and Drona, resolute in their intent to defeat them. The illustrious Arjuna, adorned with a royal diadem, driven by his wrath, engaged the foremost kings in combat. Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, and Satyaki, advanced against the forces led by Suvala's son. A terrifying battle, capable of sending shivers down one's spine, erupted once again, as the Kuru and Pandava troops clashed fiercely, each determined to overcome the other.

Chapter 14

Duryodhana and his forces humiliated. Bhisma Takes up the Challenge

Filled with rage, the kings encircled Arjuna, surrounding him with a vast multitude of chariots. They unleashed a relentless storm of weapons, hurling bright lances, spiked maces, bearded darts, battle-axes, and bludgeons towards Arjuna's golden-adorned chariot. But Arjuna, with his unmatched dexterity, skillfully intercepted the onslaught with his arrows, deflecting the shower of weapons from all directions. Witnessing Arjuna's superhuman prowess, the gods, Danavas, Gandharvas, Pisachas,

Uragas, and Rakshasas marveled and praised him with resounding acclamations.

Meanwhile, Suvala's son, along with a formidable force of Gandharas, encircled Satyaki and Abhimanyu. Fueled by anger, they relentlessly attacked the Vrishni hero, shattering his chariot with a variety of weapons. In response, Satyaki swiftly mounted Abhimanyu's chariot, and together they unleashed a torrent of straight, sharp-pointed arrows, decimating the army of Suvala's son.

Drona and Bhishma, engaged in a fierce struggle, turned their attention to the division led by King Yudhishthira. The sons of Madri, the righteous sons of Pandu, fought valiantly, grinding Drona's forces in full view of the entire army. The battle that unfolded was dreadful and awe-inspiring, evoking memories of the ancient conflicts between gods and demons. Bhimasena and Ghatotkacha also displayed their mighty feats on the battlefield.

Duryodhana, witnessing the valor of his enemies, approached Bhima and Ghatotkacha to confront them. The astonishing prowess displayed by Hidimva's son surpassed even that of his renowned father. Bhimasena, filled with wrath, pierced Duryodhana's breast with an arrow, smirking at the sight. Overwhelmed by the force of the blow, Duryodhana fell unconscious and his charioteer hastily carried him away from the battle. The troops supporting Duryodhana scattered and fled, and Bhima pursued them, striking them down with sharp arrows. Dhrishtadyumna, the heroic son of Prishata, and the righteous king Yudhishthira, in the presence of both Drona and Bhishma, decimated the enemy forces with their arrows capable of slaying hostile armies. Bhishma and Drona attempted to halt the fleeing army, but their efforts proved futile. Witnessing the rout of their thousand-strong chariot force, Subhadra's son, Abhimanyu, and the valiant Sini's grandson joined forces, wreaking havoc on the army of Suvala's son. They shone like the sun and the moon, united in the sky after the passing of the dark fortnight. Arjuna,

consumed by rage, unleashed a relentless barrage of arrows upon your army, akin to clouds pouring down torrents of rain.

As the Kaurava army fled in fear and grief, trembling under the onslaught of Arjuna's arrows, the mighty Bhishma and Drona, driven by rage and concerned for Duryodhana's well-being, attempted to halt their retreat. King Duryodhana himself, comforting his troops, managed to rally the scattered army, bringing them to a halt. Witnessing their leader, the Kshatriya warriors stopped at the spot where they saw Duryodhana, and the common soldiers, inspired by their courage, also halted in shame.

The reinvigorated army, gathered for battle, surged forward like the rising tide at the sight of the moon. Duryodhana, seeing his army regrouped, quickly approached Bhishma, the son of Santanu, and spoke to him, expressing his thoughts. He acknowledged the presence of Bhishma, Drona, and their skilled allies, stating that with their prowess, the Pandavas could not match them in battle. Duryodhana implied that he felt favored by Bhishma and criticized him for allowing the slaughter of his army. He suggested that if he deserved their support, they should fight to their full potential.

Bhishma, filled with laughter and anger, looked at Duryodhana and responded with words of wisdom. He reminded Duryodhana that he had offered advice in the past, which the king should have heeded. Bhishma proclaimed that even the gods, including Indra, would find it challenging to defeat the Pandavas in battle. However, he assured Duryodhana that he would do everything within his power to confront the sons of Pandu with their entire army. Bhishma invited Duryodhana to witness his resolve and the forthcoming battle against the Pandavas.

Delighted by Bhishma's response, Duryodhana commanded the blowing of conches and the beating of drums. The Pandavas, upon hearing the loud uproar, responded by blowing their own

conches and playing their drums and cymbals, preparing for the upcoming confrontation.

Chapter 15

Krsna Gives a Hint of his power

After the morn of that day had passed, and the sun, in his westward course, cast its fading light upon the battlefield, the indomitable Pandavas, fueled by their resolute spirits, emerged victorious. It was then that Devavrata, wise in the ways of honor, rode forth with great speed, his steeds carrying him swiftly toward the Pandava army, shielded by a mighty host.

A ghastly clash ensued, a battle that shook the very souls of those who beheld it. The twang of bows, the whip-like snap of bowstrings against hardened leather, blended into a cacophony akin to mountains rending apart.

"Stay!" bellowed the warriors, their voices fierce and unyielding. "Here I stand," they proclaimed, defiant and unafraid. "Turn back," they challenged, daring their enemies to retreat. "Stand," they commanded, prepared to face any who dared oppose them. "I wait for you," their eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Strike," they cried, as the clash of steel resounded through the air.

And the field echoed with the crash of golden armor, crowns and diadems falling like stones upon the hardened earth. Severed heads and limbs, adorned with ornate decorations, lay strewn about, yet even in death, some valiant warriors stood, weapons still clutched tightly in their lifeless grasp or bows drawn defiantly.

A dreadful river of blood coursed through the land, its crimson current flowing swiftly, mingled with flesh, bones, and the lifeblood of fallen steeds and mighty elephants. Vultures and jackals rejoiced, for it was a feast of carnage, while this river of gore, like a macabre tributary, flowed inexorably towards the ethereal ocean of the afterlife. Such a battle had never been witnessed or spoken of before, its ferocity leaving an indelible mark upon the annals of time.

The fallen combatants beseeched their loved ones with anguished cries, their voices carrying across the chaos. "Oh father, brother, friend, kinsman, do not forsake me," they wailed, their desperate pleas filling the air. And there were those who, despite grievous wounds, pressed forward, their spirits undimmed, charging valiantly into the fray.

Amidst the horrors of the battlefield, warriors shouted, calling out to their comrades, bidding them to stand firm. "Come! Join me here!" they urged, their words defiant. "Why do you cower in fear? I stand resolute in this battle. Do not falter, for I shall not."

In the midst of that battle, Bhishma, the son of Santanu, drew his bow to a full circle, unleashing arrows with tips ablaze like venomous serpents. Each arrow found its mark, as the stalwart warrior named his targets before releasing his deadly salvo. With unmatched agility, he danced upon his chariot, seemingly present everywhere like a relentless circle of fire. The Pandavas and the Srinjayas beheld this lone hero, appearing multiplied a thousandfold, his movements so swift that none could keep pace. Bhishma, by some illusion or power, had transformed into an omnipresent force, his visage glimpsed first in the east, then in the west, and in the blink of an eye, in the north and the south. The sons of Ganga witnessed him, but none among the Pandavas could even gaze upon him directly; all they could see were the countless arrows unleashed from his bow. Brave warriors, witnessing his relentless onslaught and the carnage left in his wake, could only voice their lamentations. Thousands of kings approached the grandsire, as he traversed the battlefield in a superhuman manner, only to fall upon his wrath like a swarm of mindless insects drawn to a blazing inferno. Not a single arrow shot by this deft-handed warrior was wasted, for they found their mark in the bodies of men, elephants, and steeds, their sheer numbers wreaking havoc. With a single straight-shooting arrow, he cleaved an elephant as easily as thunderbolts

cleave mountains. Two or three armored elephant riders standing together met their end with a single arrow of piercing point. Whoever dared to face Bhishma, that fierce lion among men, was seen standing one moment and lying prone on the ground the next.

The vast army of King Yudhishthira, just and righteous, crumbled under the relentless onslaught of Bhishma's incomparable prowess, scattering in a thousand directions. The mighty warriors of the Pandava army, despite their valiant efforts, could not halt the retreat of even their most skilled chariot warriors, tormented by Bhishma's relentless shafts. The force displayed by Bhishma, which routed the massive army, equaled that of the chief of gods himself. The once cohesive army was now shattered, and no two soldiers could be found standing together. Spears pierced chariots, elephants, and steeds alike, while shattered standards and broken chariot shafts littered the field. The sons of Pandu cried out in agony, their senses numbed by the unfolding calamity. Some among them discarded their armor and fled with disheveled hair. The army of the Pandavas, including their renowned leaders, resembled a bewildered herd of cattle, their anguished wails echoing through the battlefield.

The Yadava delighter, observing the rout of the enemy army, addressed Partha as he halted their noble chariot, his words carrying the weight of urgency and destiny. "The moment you have long awaited has arrived, O Partha. Strike Bhishma, O tiger among men, or else you shall lose your senses. O hero, recall your vow from the grand assembly of kings, where you proclaimed, 'I shall slay all the warriors of Dhritarashtra's sons, led by Bhishma and Drona, every one of them who dares to face me in battle.' O son of Kunti, O vanquisher of foes, let those words of yours ring true. Behold, O Vibhatsu, your own army is crumbling from all sides. Witness the kings in Yudhishthira's host fleeing in terror, beholding Bhishma in battle, resembling

Death himself with jaws agape. Overwhelmed with fear, they scatter like vulnerable prey at the sight of a lion."

In response to this, Dhananjaya replied to Vasudeva, "Drive the steeds through this hostile sea, guiding them towards Bhishma. I shall bring down that invincible warrior, the revered Kuru grandsire."

Thus, Madhava urged the silver-maned steeds towards the chariot of Bhishma, a chariot that blazed like the sun itself, too blinding to behold. And witnessing the mighty-armed Partha charging towards Bhishma, the formidable army of Yudhisthira rallied for battle. Bhishma, the foremost warrior among the Kurus, roared like a lion and unleashed a shower of arrows upon Dhananjaya's chariot. In an instant, that chariot, along with its standard and charioteer, vanished, shrouded by the torrential downpour of arrows. Yet, undeterred, Vasudeva, endowed with great strength and unwavering patience, steered the wounded steeds through Bhishma's onslaught. Partha, drawing his celestial bow, its twang resonating like thunderclouds, severed Bhishma's bow with his sharp arrows. The Kuru warrior, the venerable grandsire, swiftly grabbed another bow and strung it in the blink of an eye. With both hands, he pulled the bowstring, its twang echoing like thunder. But Arjuna, consumed by wrath, severed that bow as well.

Witnessing this display of skill and dexterity by Arjuna, the son of Santanu applauded, exclaiming, "Excellent, O Partha, O mighty-armed one, excellent, O son of Pandu. O Dhananjaya, such a magnificent feat befits you. I am pleased with you. Fight me fiercely, O son."

Having lauded Partha thus, Bhishma took up yet another mighty bow and showered his arrows upon Partha's chariot. But Vasudeva showcased his masterful charioteering skills, evading those arrows by deftly maneuvering the chariot in swift circles. Bhishma, endowed with great strength, pierced both Vasudeva and Dhananjaya with his keen arrows, their bodies bearing the

marks of those wounds. Mangled by Bhishma's arrows, these two fierce warriors resembled roaring bulls adorned with the scars of combat. Fueled by rage, Bhishma once again enveloped the two Krishnas in a relentless storm of arrows, countless in number. The enraged Bhishma caused the scion of Vrishni's race to tremble and, with his resounding laughter, left Krishna amazed. Witnessing Bhishma's prowess on the battlefield and the controlled ferocity with which Arjuna fought, seeing him unleash an unending deluge of arrows, Bhishma resembling the all-consuming Sun amidst the two armies, and witnessing his slaughter of the foremost warriors in Yudhishthira's army, a scene reminiscent of the apocalypse itself, the venerable Kesava, the destroyer of hosts, with an immeasurable soul, unable to bear the sight before him, contemplated the grim fate of Yudhishthira's army, seemingly unable to withstand such a slaughter.

"In a mere day, Bhishma can lay waste to the Daityas and the Danavas. With such ease, he can slay the sons of Pandu and their entire army. Once again, the vast army of the illustrious son of Pandu is scattering in fear. And the Kauravas, witnessing the rout of the Somakas, eagerly rush to battle, bringing joy to the grandsire. Clad in armor, I myself will confront Bhishma today for the sake of the Pandavas. I shall share the burden of the valiant Pandavas. As for Arjuna, though struck by keen arrows in battle, he remains unsure of how to act, out of respect for Bhishma."

As Krishna pondered these thoughts, the wrathful grandsire unleashed his arrows upon Partha's chariot once again. The sheer multitude of those arrows veiled the entire battlefield. The sky, the cardinal directions, the earth, and even the radiant sun itself vanished from sight. The winds blew as if mingled with smoke, and the entire battlefield appeared in turmoil. At the command of the royal scion of Santanu, Drona, Vikarna, Jayadratha, Bhurisrava, Kritavarman, Kripa, Srutayush, the ruler of the Amvashtas, Vinda, Anuvinda, Sudakshina, the warriors from the west, and various tribes including the Sauviras, Vasatis,

and Kshudrakas, and the Malavas—all of them swiftly approached Kiritin for battle.

Satyaki observed that Kiritin was surrounded by numerous cavalry, infantry, chariots, and mighty elephants. Witnessing both Vasudeva and Arjuna encircled by troops, elephants, horses, and chariots on all sides, the foremost warrior of the Sinis, chief among bearers of arms, swiftly advanced to their aid. Like Vishnu coming to the aid of the slayer of Vritra, that preeminent bowman of the Sinis rushed to Arjuna's side.

With cheerfulness, the chief of the Sinis spoke to the frightened combatants of Yudhishthira's host, whose elephants, steeds, chariots, and innumerable standards had been shattered and broken by Bhishma, causing them to flee the battlefield. He uttered these words, "O Kshatriyas, where do you flee? Such is not the duty of the righteous, as declared by the ancients. O foremost heroes, do not forsake your oaths. Fulfill your duties as warriors."

Beholding the foremost kings fleeing from the battlefield, and observing the restrained manner in which Partha fought, as well as Bhishma's mighty exertions in battle, and the Kurus closing in from all sides, the younger brother of Vasava, the valiant protector of the Dasarhas, unable to bear the situation any longer, turned to the renowned grandson of Sini and, with admiration, spoke these words: "O hero of Sini's noble lineage, those who retreat are already retreating. Let those who remain also depart. Behold, I shall soon hurl Bhishma and Drona from their chariots in the midst of the fight, along with their followers. There is none in the Kuru host, O scion of the Satwata lineage, who can escape my righteous wrath! Therefore, taking up my formidable discus, I shall slay Bhishma of unwavering vows. And by vanquishing those two foremost chariot-warriors, Bhishma and Drona, along with their allies, O grandson of Sini, I shall bring

joy to Dhananjaya, the king, Bhima, and the twin Aswins. Slaying all the sons of Dhritarashtra and those noble kings who have aligned with them, today I shall bestow upon King Ajatasatru a kingdom, filled with exultation!"

Having spoken these words, Vasudeva's son, relinquishing the reins of the steeds, stood firmly upon the chariot's platform. He whirled his discus, Sudarsana, with his right arm—a discus with a beautiful hub, an edge as sharp as a razor, radiant like the sun, and possessing the strength of a thousand heavenly bolts. This lotus-like discus, with its beautiful handle formed by Saurin's glorious arm, appeared as resplendent as the primordial lotus, shining like the morning sun, which sprang forth from Narayana's navel. Krishna's wrath resembled the morning sun that caused that lotus to bloom. The lotus's exquisite petals were as sharp as the keen edge of a razor. Krishna's divine form resembled the glorious lake, while his right arm was the stem on which that lotus blossomed. Witnessing the younger brother of Mahendra, his fury blazing and roaring fiercely, wielding that discus, all creatures let out a cry of despair, believing that the Kurus' destruction was imminent. Armed with his discus, Vasudeva resembled the Samvarta fire that emerges at the end of the Yuga to consume the world. The universal preceptor blazed like a fiery comet, poised to devour all beings.

As Santanu's son beheld that foremost of beings, that divine figure armed with the discus, stationed on his chariot, bow and arrow in hand, he fearlessly declared, "Come, come, O Lord of the gods, who holds the entire universe as your abode. I bow before you, armed with mace, sword, and Saranga bow. O ruler of the universe, forcefully cast me down from this splendid chariot, you who are the refuge of all creatures in this battle. Slain by your hand, O Krishna, my fortune will be great in this world and the next. Your respect for me is profound, O Lord of the Vrishnis and Andhakas. My glory shall resound throughout the three worlds."

Hearing Santanu's son speak, Krishna rushed forward and declared, "You are the root cause of this immense slaughter on earth. Today, you shall witness the demise of Duryodhana. A wise minister who follows the path of righteousness should restrain a king who is enslaved by the vice of gambling. And the one who, belonging to your lineage, transgresses his duties should be forsaken like one whose intellect has been misled by fate."

Upon hearing these words, the noble Bhishma responded to the chief of the Yadus, saying, "Fate holds sway over all. For the welfare of the Yadus, they had abandoned Kansa. I had conveyed this to the king (Dhritarashtra), but he paid no heed. The listener who disregards wise counsel, due to the influence of destiny, becomes afflicted with distorted understanding, leading to his own misery."

Meanwhile, Arjuna, possessing massive and powerful arms, grasped Krishna by his hands. The self-devoted Krishna, the supreme among gods, was filled with rage. Yet, despite being seized, Vishnu forcibly released himself from Arjuna's grip. However, the resolute Partha, seizing Krishna's lotus feet with great force, humbly bowed before him and spoke, "Subdue your anger, O Kesava. You are the protector of the Pandavas. By my sons and my brothers, I swear that I shall not waver from the tasks I have pledged myself to. O younger brother of Indra, at your command, I shall indeed annihilate the Kuru warriors."

Upon hearing this promise and oath, Janardana became pleased. Always engaged in doing what pleased Arjuna, the destroyer of enemies, Krishna once again took hold of the reins he had abandoned. Lifting his divine conch shell called Panchajanya, Saurin filled the entire sky and all directions with its resounding blast. Witnessing Krishna adorned with a necklace, armlets, and earrings, his eyes adorned with dust, and his teeth gleaming white, as he once again wielded his conch, the Kuru heroes let out a mighty cry. The sounds of cymbals, drums, kettle-drums, the rattling of chariot wheels, and the beating of smaller drums,

mingling with the roaring shouts, created a fierce cacophony throughout the Kurus' ranks. And the twang of Arjuna's Gandiva bow, resembling thunder, reverberated in the sky and in all directions. Brilliant and blazing arrows shot forth from Pandu's son, reaching far and wide.

The Kurus, along with Bhishma, Drona, Duryodhana, and Valhika, severely battered by Arjuna's weapons, witnessed the sun dimming its radiance. They also witnessed the dreadful and irresistible celestial weapon named after Indra, which appeared to signify the end of the Yuga. Recognizing the signs, they withdrew their forces to rest for the night. Dhananjaya, the foremost among men, having accomplished a great feat and earned great renown by crushing his enemies, beheld the sun turning crimson and the twilight descending. Having completed his mission, he retired to the camp with his brothers for the night's rest.

As darkness set in, a great and terrible uproar arose among the Kuru troops. They exclaimed, "Arjuna has slain ten thousand chariot warriors and seven hundred elephants in today's battle. All the westerners, the Sauvira tribes, the Kshudrakas, and the Malavas have been vanquished. The feat accomplished by Dhananjaya is truly mighty. None but he could have achieved such a triumph." Uttering these words, the warriors of the Kuru army retreated to their tents, which were illuminated by numerous torches and adorned with countless lamps.

Chapter 16

Morning of the 4th Day of Battle

As the night gave way to dawn, the indomitable Bhishma, his soul ablaze with wrath, led a formidable force at the forefront of the Bharata army, advancing towards the enemy. With Drona, Duryodhana, Valhika, Durmarshana, Chitrangada, the mighty Jayadratha, and other royal warriors in tow, supported by mighty divisions on all sides, they surrounded Bhishma like gods encircling their chief deity. The majestic standards mounted on the elephants stationed before their ranks, displaying a variety of colors—red, yellow, black, and brown—fluttered in the air, creating a captivating sight. The army, adorned with the presence of Santanu's son and other mighty chariot warriors, as well as elephants and steeds, shone brightly,

resembling a mass of thunderclouds or the rain-filled sky during the monsoon season.

The Kurus, eager for battle and protected by the son of Santanu, surged forward like the mighty current of the oceanic Ganga, their ranks brimming with diverse forces of great strength. Elephants, steeds, infantry, and chariots filled their ranks, as Arjuna, bearing the banner of the ape, beheld the approaching army from a distance, resembling a colossal congregation of clouds.

That heroic champion, that bull among men, stood at the forefront of his own division, mounted on his chariot adorned with a towering standard and harnessed with white steeds. Surrounded by a mighty force, Arjuna fearlessly advanced against the entire hostile army. The Kauravas, including Duryodhana and his brothers, beholding the warrior with the ape-banner, his splendid standard, and the beautifully wrapped car-shaft, accompanied by the mighty charioteer of Yadu's lineage, were filled with dismay.

The entire army witnessed that formidable formation protected by the world-renowned charioteer, Arjuna, who wielded his raised weapons. Each corner of the array was guarded by four thousand elephants. This formation, created by the best among the Kurus, King Yudhishthira the just, surpassed anything ever seen or heard of by mortal men. Thousands of drums resounded on the battlefield, accompanied by the loud blare of conch shells and the triumphant notes of trumpets. The mighty shouts of warriors echoed across the field, drowning out the clamor of drums and cymbals. Countless bows twanged, arrows ready to be unleashed, as the resounding conches subdued the cacophony. The sky was filled with the clamor of conches, while the dust raised from the earth added a mesmerizing aura. The sky seemed as if a vast canopy had been spread above, and witnessing this spectacle, the valiant warriors charged forth into battle with great fervor.

In the tumultuous clash of car-warriors, they were thrown down along with their charioteers, steeds, chariots, and banners. Struck by mighty elephants, those very elephants crashed to the ground, and foot-soldiers struck by foot-soldiers met the same fate. Horsemen charging with great force were toppled by their counterparts, their lance and sword blows inflicting fear-inducing countenances upon the fallen. It was a scene of astonishing wonder, as shields adorned with golden stars and radiating solar brilliance were shattered by the relentless assault of battle-axes, lances, and swords, strewn across the field. Many chariot warriors, battered and bruised by the tusks and powerful trunks of elephants, were hurled down along with their charioteers. Bulls among the chariot warriors, struck by their formidable peers with sharp arrows, met a similar fate, falling to the ground. The battlefield was littered with the cries of horsemen and foot-soldiers struck by the tusks and limbs of elephants or trampled under the thunderous charge of those colossal beasts.

Amidst the chaos, Bhishma, encircled by a host of mighty car-warriors, caught sight of the warrior bearing the banner adorned with the prince of apes. The warrior, Son of Santanu, his banner bearing five palmyra trees, charged forth against the diadem-adorned Arjuna, whose chariot, propelled by fleet-footed steeds, possessed extraordinary power and blazed like lightning due to the energy of his formidable weapons. Numerous warriors, led by Drona, Kripa, Salya, Vivinsati, Duryodhana, and Somadatta's valiant son, also rushed against Arjuna.

In response, the heroic Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, well-versed in all weapons and clad in resplendent golden armor, swiftly emerged from the ranks, confronting all those mighty warriors. Effortlessly parrying the powerful weapons of those formidable adversaries, he appeared radiant like the revered Agni, with his blazing flames upon the sacrificial altar, invoked through sacred mantras.

The mighty Bhishma, exuding immense energy, turned the battlefield into a river coursing with the blood of his enemies. Swiftly avoiding Subhadra's son, he then engaged in combat with the great chariot-warrior, Partha himself. Arjuna, adorned with a diadem and garlands, wielding his wondrous Gandiva bow, whose resounding twang echoed like thunder, showered a cascade of arrows and polished shafts with broadheads, thwarting the onslaught of Bhishma's formidable barrage. The troops, both Kauravas and Srinjayas, along with the onlooking multitude, beheld this fierce duel between the two foremost men—Bhishma and Dhananjaya—as they steadfastly clashed, their bows resounding with a terrible twang.

Chapter 17

Abhimanyu and Dhristadyumna display there prowess

Drona's valiant son, Bhurisravas, Chitrangada, and the son of Samyamani, all joined forces to confront Subhadra's son. And amidst the fierce clash, he stood alone, like a young lion taking on five mighty elephants, displaying unparalleled energy and prowess. None among them could match Krishna's son in accuracy of aim, bravery, strength, agility, or knowledge of weaponry. Witnessing his son's relentless struggle and valor on the battlefield, Partha, emitting a lion-like roar, saw Abhimanyu beset by warriors from all sides. Unyielding in the face of adversity, that scion of Subhadra, relying on his might and skill, fearlessly advanced against the Kaurava army.

Engaged in combat with his adversaries, his radiant bow, shining like the sun, was ceaselessly drawn and released, observed by all. He pierced Drona's son with a single arrow, Salya with five, and with eight shafts, he brought down the standard of Samyamani's son. With another razor-edged arrow, he severed the golden staff resembling a snake—a formidable dart hurled at him by Somadatta's son. Defying the sight of Salya, Abhimanyu expertly neutralized his hundreds of terrifying arrows and slew his four steeds. Overwhelmed by

Krishna's son's display of strength, Bhurisravas, Salya, Drona's son, Samyamani, and Sala could not withstand him.

Then, urged by Duryodhana, the Trigartas, Madras, and Kekayas, totaling twenty-five thousand skilled warriors undefeated in battle, encircled both Kiritin (Arjuna) and his son to slay them.

Witnessing the father-son duo surrounded, the commander of the Pandava army, the illustrious prince of the Panchalas, led his troops, supported by countless elephants, chariots, cavalry, and infantry, against the division of the Madras and Kekayas. As they advanced, protected by that renowned and steadfast archer, their array of cars, elephants, and cavalry appeared resplendent. While heading towards Arjuna, that champion of the Panchala lineage, with a heart full of fury, struck Saradwat's son thrice on his shoulder joint with arrows. He swiftly dispatched ten sharp shafts into the Madrakas and slew the guardian of Kritavarman's rear. With a broad-headed arrow, he vanquished Damana, the heir of the noble Paurava lineage.

Samyamani's son then pierced the indomitable Panchala prince with ten arrows and his charioteer with ten more. Enraged and severely wounded, the prince of Panchala swiftly cut off his foe's bow with a razor-sharp arrow, causing the bloodied Samyamani's son to lick the corners of his mouth. The prince of Panchala followed up with twenty-five arrows, eventually slaying his opponent's steeds and the protectors of his flanks. Subsequently, Samyamani's son, standing upon his steedless chariot, cast his gaze upon the son of the renowned King Drupada. Armed with a fearsome scimitar forged from finest steel, Samyamani's son, on foot, approached the chariot of Drupada's son. The Pandavas, their soldiers, and Dhrishtadyumna of the Prishata lineage watched him advance like a crashing wave, resembling a serpent descending from the heavens. Whirling his sword, he resembled the sun and charged forward like a raging elephant. The prince of Panchala, filled with rage, picked up a mace and shattered the head of his

oncoming adversary, who was armed with a sharp-edged scimitar and shield, just as the latter, having closed the distance, approached the prince's chariot. Thus, Samyamani's son fell lifeless, and his blazing scimitar and shield slipped from his grasp, falling to the ground alongside his body. The valiant son of the Panchala king, renowned for his incredible prowess, achieved great fame by slaying his foe with the mace. As the prince fell, cries of sorrow and dismay erupted from your troops.

Enraged at witnessing the death of his own son, Samyamani rushed impetuously towards the invincible prince of Panchala. All the kings of the Kuru and Pandava armies observed the battle between these two illustrious warriors and foremost chariot fighters. Samyamani, filled with wrath, struck Prishata's son with three arrows, akin to a mahout prodding a mighty elephant with hooks. Salya, the ornament of assemblies, also driven by anger, struck the valiant son of Prishata on his chest. Thus, another fierce battle commenced between them

Chapter 18

Bhima Grinds The Enemy Once More

In the midst of the battle, Dhrishtadyumna, despite being struck by Salya with nine arrows, retaliated by showering the ruler of Madras with numerous steel-tipped shafts. The display of Prishata's son's prowess was truly remarkable, as he swiftly checked Salya, the ornament of assemblies. Their fierce duel lasted only a brief period, with neither of them finding a moment's respite. Salya, in his anger, severed Dhrishtadyumna's bow with a broad-headed arrow possessing a sharp edge and exceptional quality. He also unleashed a torrential downpour of arrows upon him, resembling raindrops falling upon a mountain during the rainy season.

While Dhrishtadyumna faced these afflictions, Abhimanyu, filled with wrath, rushed vehemently towards the chariot of the ruler of Madras. The son of Krishna, with his immeasurable valor, closed in on Artayani and pierced him with three sharp arrows, as he was within shooting distance. The warriors of the Kuru army, eager to confront Arjuna's son in battle, quickly surrounded the chariot of the Madras king. Duryodhana, Vikarna, Dussasana, Vivinsati, Durmarshana, Dussala, Chitrangada, Durmukha, Satyabrata, and Purumitra—all took their positions to protect the chariot of the ruler of Madras.

In response, Bhimasena, filled with fury, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, along with the five sons of Draupadi, Abhimanyu, and the twin sons of Madri and Pandu—all ten of them—confronted the ten warriors of the Dhritarashtra army, wielding various weapons. They clashed with one another, intent on slaying their opponents. As the ten mighty chariot fighters, driven by wrath, engaged the other ten warriors in that fearsome battle, the remaining soldiers stood by as spectators. The combatants unleashed diverse weapons, roaring at each other, and struck one another fiercely. Filled with wrath and with the intent to kill, they shouted challenging cries, engaging in a relentless exchange of blows. The kinsmen, driven by jealousy and united in purpose, confronted one another furiously, launching powerful weapons. It was astonishing to witness. Duryodhana, aflame with rage, pierced Dhrishtadyumna with four sharp arrows. Durmarshana struck him with twenty, Chitrangada with five, Durmukha with nine, Dussaha with seven, Vivinsati with five, and Dussasana with three shafts. In return, the formidable son of Prishata pierced each of them with twenty-five arrows, displaying his incredible dexterity. Abhimanyu, on the other hand, targeted Satyavrata and Purumitra, shooting ten arrows at each. The sons of Madri, those delighters of their mother, showered their uncle with a barrage of sharp arrows. All of this was truly remarkable to witness.

Observing Bhimasena, the mighty-armed son of Pandu, wielding his upraised mace, resembling the crested Mount

Kailasa, the sons of Dhritarashtra fled in terror, eager to put an end to the conflict.

Duryodhana's fury blazed like a wildfire, and he unleashed the formidable Magadha division, comprising ten thousand mighty elephants. With the ruler of Magadha leading the charge, the ferocious king advanced towards Bhimasena, his heart seething with vengeance. But as the elephant division thundered forth, Bhima, a force to be reckoned with, leapt from his chariot with a roar that shook the very heavens, echoing the ferocity of a lion. Clutching his mighty mace, infused with the strength of unyielding adamant, he charged headlong at the oncoming elephants, resembling a vengeful deity, jaws agape.

Bhima, with his Herculean might, swung his mace, smashing elephants with each devastating blow, rampaging across the battlefield like the legendary slayer of demons, Vritra. His thunderous roars echoed through the air, striking fear into the hearts and minds of all who heard them, causing the elephants to shrink back, paralyzed by terror. Sensing the impending doom, they lost all power of movement, frozen by the sheer force of Bhima's presence.

Yet, Bhima was not alone in his heroic onslaught. The valiant sons of Draupadi, the fierce Subhadra's son, Nakula, Sahadeva, and Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, formed a protective shield around Bhima, defending his rear. With their relentless arrow showers, they pierced through the enemy ranks like a tempestuous rain, striking down foes battling atop the mighty elephants. The decapitated heads of elephant riders, the arms adorned with ornate jewelry, and the hands clutching iron hooks rained down upon the battlefield, resembling a hailstorm of stone.

Headless bodies slumped over the backs of their mounts, mirroring headless trees atop desolate mountaintops. Dhrishtadyumna, the valiant scion of Prishata, felled numerous

mighty elephants, their lifeless forms crashing to the ground. The ruler of Magadha, witnessing the havoc wreaked by Bhima, mounted his own elephant, a majestic creature akin to Airavata himself, and charged towards Subhadra's valiant son. However, before he could reach his target, the brave slayer of heroic adversaries released a single arrow that pierced through the mighty elephant, sealing its fate.

With the ruler of Magadha now deprived of his mighty mount, the conqueror of hostile cities, the son of Krishna, swiftly severed the king's head with a broad-headed shaft, its silver wings gleaming in the sunlight. Bhimasena, having penetrated the formidable elephant division, continued his rampage across the battlefield, crushing the beasts underfoot like Indra himself crushing mountains. Each swing of his mace, akin to thunderbolts splitting hills, claimed the lives of elephants, their tusks shattered, temples crushed, bones shattered, and backs broken.

The fallen elephants lay scattered, their lifeless bodies adorned with foaming mouths. Mighty tuskers, their frontal globes reduced to rubble, spewed forth torrents of blood. Some, overwhelmed by fear, crumbled to the ground like massive hillocks. Bhima, smeared with the fat, blood, and even the marrow of elephants, roamed the field like a harbinger of death, his club poised to strike. Whirling his blood-soaked mace, he became a terrifying and awe-inspiring sight, akin to the wielder of the divine Pinaka bow, Lord Shiva himself.

The enraged Bhima's onslaught left the mighty elephants in disarray, desperately fleeing the scene, trampling the ranks of the Kuru army in their desperate escape. Throughout this carnage, the valiant warriors, led by Subhadra's son, skillfully protected Bhima, their hero. They shielded him with a celestial canopy of arrows, as the gods protect the wielder of the thunderbolt. Bhimasena, with his indomitable spirit, resembled the very Destroyer. Unleashing his formidable might from all sides, his mace poised to strike, he resembled Lord Shiva,

dancing the cosmic dance at the end of an epoch. His fierce, weighty, and resounding mace echoed the club of Yama, possessed of the thunderous sound of Indra's bolt.

His mace, drenched in the blood and marrow of elephants, bore a striking resemblance to Rudra's wrathful Pinaka bow, wielded during the annihilation of all creation. As a shepherd disciplines his cattle with a sharp goad, Bhima smote the elephant division with his mighty mace. Amidst the slaughter inflicted by Bhima and the relentless shower of arrows from his allies, the elephants scattered in all directions, trampling the chariots of the Kuru army like a tempestuous wind scattering clouds. Amidst this chaos, Bhima stood firm, resembling the wielder of the trident in a macabre crematorium, where death loomed in every corner.

When the elephant division met its doom, Duryodhana's rage knew no bounds. He commanded his entire army to slay Bhimasena, and like a tidal wave crashing upon the shore, his vast and seemingly endless army surged towards the mighty warrior. The battlefield trembled under the weight of countless chariots, elephants, and horses, echoing with the blaring of conches and the thunderous beat of drums. It was a sea of troops, impenetrable and unyielding, approaching Bhimasena with relentless fury. But the son of Pandu stood firm, unmovable like a mountain standing against the raging ocean.

This sight was truly wondrous and beyond human comprehension. With his mace in hand, Bhima fearlessly confronted the kings who rushed towards him with their chariots, horses, and elephants, emitting fierce shouts of battle. He checked that massive force with his mace, standing his ground amidst the chaos, resembling the Destroyer himself. His brother, sons, Dhrishtadyumna of Prishata's lineage, the sons of Draupadi, Abhimanyu, and the invincible Sikhandin, all stood by his side, unyielding and unafraid. Bhima, wielding his massive and weighty mace made of Saika iron, charged at the

enemy warriors like the very embodiment of destruction, armed with his club. He crushed the enemy chariots and horsemen with the force of his thighs, slaying your warriors on the battlefield, moving like the Destroyer himself at the end of an epoch. He crushed the enemy troops with ease, like an elephant trampling a forest of reeds. He dragged car warriors from their chariots, warriors fighting atop heroes, and foot soldiers standing on the ground, slaying them all with his mace, just as the wind topples trees with its force. His mace, smeared with the fat, marrow, flesh, and blood of elephants and horses, took on a terrifying appearance. The field of battle was strewn with the bodies of the slain, resembling the abode of Yama, the god of death. Bhimasena's terrible and lethal mace, radiant with the splendor of Indra's thunderbolt, looked like the wrathful Pinaka bow of Rudra, destroying all living beings. Indeed, that mace of the high-souled son of Kunti, who was slaying everything around him, shone fiercely like the bludgeon of the Destroyer himself during the time of universal dissolution.

As they witnessed Bhima repeatedly routing their vast army and advancing like the embodiment of death, the warriors on the opposing side became disheartened. Wherever Bhima cast his gaze, it seemed as though the enemy troops would simply melt away. Seeing Vrikodara with his awe-inspiring deeds, routing the army effortlessly and remaining invincible against such overwhelming numbers, devouring the enemy division like Death himself, Bhimasena swiftly approached him in his chariot, shining with the brilliance of the sun and thundering like the clouds. At the same time, the mighty-armed Satyaki of the Vrishni clan, renowned for his accuracy, fiercely attacked Bhishma, slaying his enemies along the way, causing the entire army to tremble.

The combatants on the enemy side were unable to hinder the progress of Satyaki, who advanced with his silvery steeds, unleashing a relentless shower of arrows with wings as beautiful as the clouds charged with rain. They showered their arrows upon him like torrents of rain on a mountain, but they could not

impede the hero who shone like the midday sun. There was no one on the battlefield who did not feel despair, except for Somadatta's son and Bhurisravas, who, witnessing the retreat of their own chariot warriors, rushed towards Satyaki, eager for battle, wielding his fiercely propelled bow.

Bhurisravas, filled with great wrath, pierced Satyaki with nine arrows, akin to an elephant trainer piercing an elephant with an iron hook. But in return, Satyaki, with immeasurable courage, shot nine arrows at the Kaurava warrior. King Duryodhana, accompanied by his half-brothers, surrounded Somadatta's son, who was valiantly fighting in battle. Similarly, the Pandavas, with their great strength, swiftly encircled Satyaki, taking their positions around him. Bhimasena, fueled by anger, confronted all your sons led by Duryodhana, wielding his mace with indomitable might. Nandaka, with his thousands of chariots, sought to impede Bhimasena's advance by piercing him with keen-edged arrows, sharpened on stones and feathered with the wings of the kanka bird. In return, Bhima struck Nandaka with four arrows, and the grandson of Sini continued his march. The sight of the hero of the Vrishni lineage advancing and effortlessly plowing through the ranks of the enemy, his sharp arrows raining down upon them, left the entire army in awe

In the midst of the raging battlefield, the mighty and formidable Bhima, with his bulging muscles and fierce determination, mounted his excellent chariot. He turned to his charioteer, Visoka, and spoke with unwavering confidence, "These sons of Dhritarashtra, these great warriors, are seething with anger and thirst for my blood. But I will not falter. I will slay them all without a shadow of doubt. So, charioteer, guide our steed with utmost care in this battle."

With his words fueling his spirit, Pritha's son unleashed a storm of gold-adorned, sharp-pointed arrows, piercing Duryodhana's formidable frame. In retaliation, Duryodhana shot six arrows at

the mighty Bhima and then turned his attention to Visoka, piercing him with three sharp arrows. The Kaurava king seemed to smirk as he skillfully severed the resplendent bow of Bhima, leaving the charioteer battered by his relentless assault. Overwhelmed by anger, Bhima, unable to bear witness to Visoka's plight, grabbed another excellent bow, his wrath kindling within him. With great fury, he took hold of an arrow with a horse-shoe-shaped head and powerful wings, a deadly weapon indeed. With that arrow, Bhima shattered Duryodhana's excellent bow, leaving the Kuru king fuming with rage.

Driven to the peak of fury, Duryodhana swiftly discarded the broken bow and grasped another, even stronger than before. Like a man possessed, he aimed a terrible shaft, blazing as Death's very rod, and with unyielding rage, struck Bhimasena between his two mighty breasts. The deep wound caused immense pain, and Bhima, overcome by the agony, slumped down on the terrace of his chariot, momentarily losing consciousness.

Witnessing Bhima's vulnerability, the valiant warriors of the Pandava army, led by Abhimanyu, could not stand idly by. With unwavering resolve, they unleashed a torrent of fierce arrows upon the Kuru forces, raining down upon them without mercy. Regaining his senses, the mighty Bhimasena retaliated, piercing Duryodhana with his arrows, first five and then twenty-five more, causing the Kuru king to retreat from the battlefield.

Meanwhile, fourteen of Dhritarashtra's sons, including Senapati, Sushena, Jalasandha, Sulochana, Ugra, Bhimaratha, Bhima, Viravahu, Aolupa, Durmukha, Dushpradarsha, Vivitsu, Vikata, and Sama, joined forces and launched themselves at Bhimasena. With their eyes ablaze with fury, they showered countless arrows, deeply piercing the mighty warrior. But Bhima, undeterred and resembling a hungry wolf amidst a pack of prey, charged at them with the ferocity of Garuda.

Bhima swiftly severed the head of Senapati with a shaft sporting a horse-shoe-shaped head. With a triumphant smile, he dispatched Jalasandha to the abode of Yama with three arrows. Sushena met a similar fate, sent to the presence of Death himself by the mighty Bhima. Ugra, with his moon-like handsome face adorned with a turban and earrings, fell to the ground with his head severed by a single broad-headed shaft.

In the midst of this great battle, Bhima, with seventy deadly arrows, sent Viravahu and his steeds, standard, and charioteer to the realm of Yama. Bhima's laughter resonated as he swiftly dispatched both Bhima and Bhimaratha to the domain of death. Witnessing the relentless onslaught of the illustrious warrior, the remaining Kuru princes trembled with fear and fled from the battlefield, abandoning their futile resistance against the unstoppable Bhimasena

Santanu's valiant son, with unwavering resolve, addressed the mighty car-warriors in his army, his voice booming with authority, "Bhima, that fearsome archer, fueled by his wrath, is slaughtering the powerful sons of Dhritarashtra and all the brave warriors who dare to stand against him, regardless of their skill or courage. We must capture that son of Pandu!"

Fueled by rage, the troops of the Dhritarashtra army rushed towards the indomitable Bhimasena, their combined might bearing down upon him. Suddenly, Bhagadatta, mounted on his temple-pierced elephant, thundered towards Bhimasena's position. With arrows sharp as stone, Bhagadatta shrouded Bhima, making him disappear like the sun hidden behind a veil of dark clouds. The Pandava warriors, relying on their own arm strength, could not tolerate Bhima's concealment under Bhagadatta's arrowy showers. They encircled Bhagadatta on all sides, unleashing a torrent of arrows that pierced his elephant and struck him relentlessly. The ruler of Pragjyotisha, with blood trickling down his body, appeared majestic on the

battlefield, like a mass of clouds tinged with the radiant hues of the sun. Urged by Bhagadatta, the elephant, his temples dripping with temporal juice, charged with twice the speed, shaking the very earth with its mighty strides. Witnessing the fearsome countenance of the beast, the mighty car-warriors felt their courage wane.

In a swift motion, Bhagadatta, the fierce tiger among men, driven by fury, pierced Bhimasena between his mighty breasts with an arrow. Deeply wounded, the great archer and formidable warrior lost sensation in his limbs, causing him to slump on his chariot, clutching his flagstaff. Seeing the terrified warriors and Bhimasena in a swoon, Bhagadatta, displaying his immense prowess, let out a thunderous roar.

Observing Bhima's state, the terrible Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, consumed by rage, vanished from sight. Creating a terrifying illusion that intensified the fears of the timid, he reappeared in a fearsome form. Riding on an Airavata conjured by his illusionary powers, Ghatotkacha was followed by three colossal elephants — Anjana, Vamana, and Mahapadma, radiating blazing glory. These mighty elephants, ridden by Rakshasas, possessed immense size, with copious juices trickling down their bodies, and were endowed with incredible speed and strength.

Ghatotkacha spurred his own elephant into battle, determined to slay Bhagadatta and his elephant. The other elephants, driven by furious Rakshasas and armed with four tusks each, assailed Bhagadatta's elephant, tormenting it with their sharp tusks. Bhagadatta's elephant, already wounded by arrows and suffering intense pain, bellowed in agony, its cries echoing like the thunderous roars of Indra.

Hearing the thunderous cries of the distressed elephant and sensing the dire situation faced by Bhagadatta, Bhishma, addressing Drona, Suyodhana, and all the kings, proclaimed, "Mighty archer Bhagadatta is engaged in a fierce battle with the

wicked-hearted son of Hidimva, and he is in grave peril. The Rakshasa is colossal in size, and the king himself is seething with wrath. Engaged in a fierce clash, they are on the brink of mutual destruction. We can hear the exulting shouts of the Pandavas and the anguished cries of Bhagadatta's terror-stricken elephant. Let us hasten to rescue the king, for if we abandon him on the battlefield, he will surely meet his end. Warriors of unwavering valor, waste no time! The battle rages on, growing fiercer by the moment, sending shivers down our spines. This division commander is of noble birth, endowed with unmatched bravery, and loyal to our cause. Warriors of undying glory, it is our duty to save him!"

Upon hearing Bhishma's words, all the kings of the Kuru army, led by Bharadwaja's son, hastened to the aid of Bhagadatta, their resolve unwavering. The Panchalas and the Pandavas, with Yudhishthira at the forefront, pursued the enemy closely behind. In response, the mighty Rakshasa prince let out a thunderous roar, resonating through the air like the rumble of thunder.

Taking note of the advancing enemy and hearing the fierce roar, Bhishma once again addressed Bharadwaja's son, expressing his reluctance, "I have no desire to engage in combat today with the wicked-souled son of Hidimva. He possesses immense strength and is well-supported at present. Even the wielder of the thunderbolt himself would find it difficult to defeat him. His aim is unfailing, and he strikes with great force. Moreover, our own animals are weary today, and we have suffered greatly at the hands of the Panchalas and the victorious Pandavas. I do not wish to face the Pandavas in a fresh encounter. Let us declare the withdrawal of our army today. Tomorrow we shall face the enemy in battle."

Upon hearing these words from the venerable grandsire, the Kauravas, afflicted with fear of Ghatotkacha, eagerly seized the opportunity presented by the approaching night and complied

with his directive. They gladly retreated, while the triumphant Pandavas, resounding with lion-like roars, combined with the blaring of conches and the melodies of pipes. Thus, the day's battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas, led by Ghatotkacha, came to a close. The vanquished Kauravas, burdened with shame, retired to their own tents as night fell. The valiant sons of Pandu, their bodies adorned with wounds from the battle, and filled with a sense of victory, proceeded towards their encampment, with Bhima and Ghatotkacha at the forefront. They joyously paid homage to these heroes and their jubilant shouts reverberated, mingling with the trumpets' blare, causing the very earth to tremble and inflicting anguish upon the hearts of the Kurus. Thus, when night descended, those warriors, the scourge of their foes, returned to their tents. Meanwhile, King Duryodhana, grief-stricken and desolate at the loss of his brothers, meticulously arranged his camp according to military principles. Engulfed in sorrow and anguish, he spent the hours in contemplation, weighed down by his heavy heart.

Chapter 19

Bhisma speaks about the advent of Krishna

Amidst the echoing cries of his decimated troops, Dhritarashtra turned to Sanjaya, his voice heavy with fear and uncertainty. The tales of the Pandavas' wondrous achievements and the deaths of his own sons had rattled him to the core. It seemed as though destiny itself held sway over every unfolding event. His mind pondered the question that gnawed at him: What penances had the sons of Pandu performed? What blessings had they acquired to emerge so triumphantly on the battlefield? Without a shadow of doubt, Bhima would wreak havoc upon his progeny. Seeking solace, Dhritarashtra beseeched Sanjaya to unravel the true cause behind these cataclysmic happenings.

Sanjaya, in response, spoke with a commanding tone, urging the king to lend an attentive ear to his words. He dispelled any notion that the Pandavas' capabilities were mere products of mystic illusions, mantras, or ascetic endeavors. Their triumph stemmed from their unwavering devotion to Lord Krishna, the very source of their impending victory. Sanjaya did not mince

his words when he spoke of Dhritarashtra's own sons, labeling them as wicked beings who stood defiantly against the divine will and reveled in acts of cruelty. They now reaped the bitter fruits of their own animosity towards the Pandavas, an enmity that had been utterly unnecessary. Sanjaya lamented that even the combined wisdom of Vidura, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and himself had failed to awaken Dhritarashtra to the reality of the situation. The king resembled a sick man who, in his folly, had spurned the healing remedies and instead embraced the venomous advice of his own son.

Sanjaya then shifted his narrative, recounting a conversation that had unfolded between Duryodhana and Bhishma on the same vexing matter after the night's brutal clash. Duryodhana had ventured into the assembly of his grandsire and the esteemed leaders of their army, his heart besieged by doubts that demanded resolution. He sought to unravel the enigma that confounded him: Why were the Pandavas prevailing over them in battle, despite the fact that the great commanders in his own army were a match for celestial deities? With fervor, Duryodhana implored the venerable Bhishma to dispel the doubts that tormented his soul.

Bhishma, with the wisdom and weight of his years, addressed the king, his words carrying the echoes of countless pleas he had made in the past. He had implored Duryodhana time and again to seek reconciliation with the Pandavas, recognizing the immense benefits such a course of action would bestow upon him and his entire lineage. Bhishma's appeals had fallen upon deaf ears, shackled by Duryodhana's unwavering envy towards the Pandavas. Now, the repercussions of Duryodhana's transgressions against the sons of Pandu were unfolding before their very eyes. Bhishma assured the king that there was no warrior, present or yet to come, capable of slaying the valiant sons of Pandu. Their protection lay in the hands of Lord Krishna, the eternal Lord Vishnu, who wielded the discus for the safeguarding of celestial realms. Bhishma, in his venerable manner, recounted a tale of a bygone age, when Lord Brahma

and an assembly of gods, sages, and celestial beings had paid homage to Lord Vishnu atop the heavenly Gandhamadana mountains. Lord Brahma, in his reverent prayers, acknowledged Lord Vishnu as the Supreme Master of the Universe and the guardian of surrendered souls. Brahma recognized his own birth from the divine navel of Lord Vishnu and the creative potency bestowed upon him by the Supreme Lord. Brahma's devotion remained steadfast, focused on the goal of attaining union with the divine through the practice of Yoga. He prophesied that Lord Vishnu, for the sake of establishing righteous principles, would manifest Himself as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva in the Yadu dynasty. Alongside the divine incarnation Nara, Lord Vishnu would vanquish all demonic forces that dared to oppose the sanctity of those principles.

In the telling of these tales, Sanjaya painted a vivid portrait of the prevailing circumstances, intertwining the threads of destiny, devotion, and the cosmic intervention of the divine. The words carried weight, leaving Dhritarashtra and his troubled soul to contemplate the intricate web of causes and consequences that had woven itself around the fates of both the Pandavas and his own ill-fated sons.

Bhishma's voice resonated with conviction as he continued to enlighten Duryodhana. He recounted a timeless tale, passed down through the ages by revered rishis like Parashurama, Narada, Vyasa, and Markandeya. The story spoke of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna, who had graced the assembly of celestial beings atop the heavenly Gandhamadana mountains. After receiving worship and reverence from all present, Lord Krishna returned to His divine abode in the Vaikuntha planetary system. Bhishma had imparted this knowledge to Duryodhana countless times, urging him to abstain from fighting the Pandavas, but the prince had stubbornly turned a deaf ear to such counsel. Bhishma's disappointment grew, viewing Duryodhana as a wicked Rakshasa, engulfed in darkness and ignorance. How could they hope to defeat Arjuna and Krishna, who were none other than

Nara and Narayana themselves? The very existence of the three worlds rested upon Krishna, the Lord of all moving and non-moving beings, the harbinger of victory, and the greatest warrior. It was by the unseen divine energies of this Supreme Lord that the sons of Pandu would emerge triumphant.

Duryodhana, compelled by the magnitude of Krishna's exalted status, expressed his desire to hear more about the origin and glories of Vasudeva, the Supreme Being.

Bhishma obliged, describing Vasudeva as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the sovereign over all lords, with eyes resembling delicate lotus petals. It was He who had created the Earth for the establishment of righteous principles. Fire emanated from His mouth, wind from His breath, and the four Vedas, which guide humanity, from His speech. He reclined on the bed of Ananta Shesha, the divine serpent, situated at the bottom of the universe, sustaining all beings. He had incarnated as the boar and as Lord Nrisimhadeva. He was the divine dwarf, Vamana, who, in three strides, had taken away all of Bali's possessions. From His mouth, He had created the Brahmanas, from His arms, the Kshatriyas, from His belly, the Vaishyas, and from His legs, the Shudras. He was the master of the senses, Hrishikesha, and the object of worship for great sages. Those who sought His shelter would never be vanquished in their struggle through the material existence. Yudhisthira, recognizing the splendor of Lord Keshava, had wholeheartedly taken refuge in His lotus feet.

With utmost clarity, Bhishma concluded his discourse, ensuring that Duryodhana comprehended the glory and divinity of Lord Krishna, as well as the true identity of Nara, who was none other than Arjuna. He had elucidated the reasons behind their descent to the mortal realm. Moreover, Bhishma had emphasized the invincibility of the Pandavas in battle, making it abundantly clear that they could never be slain. Thus, he reiterated his entreaty for Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas. Disregarding the divine Nara and Narayana would only lead to

annihilation, encompassing all of Duryodhana's brothers and kinsmen. Having imparted his words of wisdom, the venerable Grandsire retreated into his tent, seeking rest for the night.

Chapter 20

The 5th day of the great battle,

Under Dhristadyumna's command, the Pandava troops took their positions in the formidable formation known as Makara. At the forefront stood Drupada and Dhananjaya, like the head of the mystical creature. Sahadeva and Nakula, possessing keen vision, formed the eyes, while the mighty Bhimasena assumed the role of the beak. The neck of this formation comprised Abhimanyu, the valiant sons of Draupadi, Ghatotkacha, Satyaki, and King

Yudhisthira. Supporting them from behind was King Virata, the ruler of the Matsyas, bolstered by Dhristadyumna. Dhrishtaketu and Chekitana took their positions as the right and left wings, and the blessed warriors Kuntibhoja and Satanika formed the feet. Shikhandi and Iravan, known for their exceptional archery skills, formed the majestic tail of this great bird.

On the other side, Bhishma arranged the Kaurava divisions in the formation of a colossal crane. Drona, with his immense power, occupied the position of the beak, while Ashvatthama and Kripa served as the piercing eyes. Kritavarman and Bahlika, along with their respective troops, stood as the head, while Duryodhana formed the neck. The ruler of Pragjyotisapura, Bhagadatta, mounted on his formidable elephant named Supratika, constituted the body of the gigantic bird. King Susharman stood proud as the tail.

As the early morning twilight embraced the battlefield, both armies revealed their resplendence. The soldiers adorned themselves in golden armor, each wielding distinct weapons. The chariots flaunted multicolored flags, stretching from east to west. Mighty elephants, armored and imposing, formed a line at the forefront of the battle formation, resembling towering mountains with clouds resting upon their peaks. The chariots, adorned with intricate carvings and embellishments of gold and silver, were equipped with an array of deadly weapons. Warriors, brimming with relentless determination, filled the sky with fierce war cries, eager for the impending clash.

When the sun gracefully peeked over the horizon, the battle commenced. Elephants charged against elephants, horsemen clashed with horsemen, and chariot fighters engaged in intense combat. Fueled by rage, they attacked one another with unwavering fervor. Drona, with his expertise, swiftly advanced towards Bhima, piercing him with nine arrows. In retaliation, Bhima swiftly dispatched the charioteer of Drona, plunging his horses into disarray. Drona himself seized the reins, engulfing the Pandava army in his fierce assault.

Amidst the chaos, the Herculean Bhimasena confronted the younger brothers of Duryodhana, including Duhshasana, Durvisaha, Dussaha, Durmada, Jaya, Jayatsena, Vikarna, Chitrangada, Sudarshana, Charuchitra, Suvarman, Dushkarna, and Karna. Witnessing Bhima's approach, they resolved to vanquish him on the battlefield. Accompanied by countless chariot fighters, they swarmed around Bhima, showering him with a barrage of weapons. Yet, fear failed to grip Bhima's heart, and with a smile on his face, he descended from his chariot, wielding his mighty mace. With a resounding roar, he surged through the sea of the Kaurava army, leaving a trail of utter devastation in his wake.

As Dhristadyumna reached Bhima's chariot, he asked Vishoka about the whereabouts of the second son of Pandu. Vishoka informed him that Bhima had ventured into the enemy ranks alone, armed only with his mace. Determined to assist his friend, Dhristadyumna followed the path of devastation left by Bhima and entered the Kaurava army. He witnessed enormous elephants shattered by Bhima's mace and countless lifeless bodies strewn across the battlefield. Finally, he found Bhima amidst the chaos, annihilating enemy troops like a relentless hurricane felling a forest of trees. The Kaurava warriors had surrounded Bhima, attempting in vain to vanquish him, as he single-handedly slaughtered hundreds within minutes. Bhima was drenched in blood and covered in numerous arrows. Dhristadyumna swiftly came to his aid, taking him onto his chariot, and carefully removing the arrows while embracing him.

Eager to slay both Bhima and Dhristadyumna, Duryodhana's brothers charged at them while they stood in their chariot. They exclaimed, "This wicked son of Drupada is now united with Bhima. Let us kill them both and bring great joy to King Duryodhana." Prompted by Duryodhana, thousands of warriors launched their assault, showering Bhima and Dhristadyumna with a barrage of weapons.

Observing Dhritarashtra's sons approaching their chariot, the Panchala prince invoked his celestial weapon called pramohana, releasing it above the Kaurava army. This divine weapon robbed the soldiers of their senses, causing them to fall helplessly to the ground. Drona, witnessing the situation, hastened to aid the sons of Dhritarashtra, countering the pramohana weapon by unleashing his own called prajna. When the soldiers regained their senses, they challenged Bhima and Dhristadyumna, showering them with arrows. Sensing the danger, Yudhisthira ordered twelve formidable warriors, including Abhimanyu, the sons of Draupadi, Dhrishtaketu, and the Kekaya brothers, to assist Bhima. They were supported by a large division of troops and formed the suchimukha formation, resembling a needle's point. Penetrating the Kaurava ranks and breaking their front lines, they advanced toward the battleground where Bhima and Dhristadyumna fought. Overjoyed at the sight of this reinforcement, the Pandava army cheered and roared. Bhima then mounted the chariot of the King of the Kaikeyas, while Dhristadyumna confronted the preceptor Drona, who approached him with great speed. Drona swiftly severed the bow of the son of Drupada, but Dhristadyumna quickly took up another bow and pierced Drona with seventy arrows. Enraged, Drona cut the bow from Dhristadyumna's hand and killed his four horses. Dhristadyumna promptly ascended Abhimanyu's chariot and departed the battlefield. Drona, filled with fury, proceeded to decimate the Pandava army within Bhima's sight

Duryodhana, accompanied by his brothers, launched a relentless assault on Bhima, seizing every opportunity to bring him down. Bhima, undeterred, climbed onto his chariot and gripped a massive bow, ready to unleash destruction upon his cousins. In a brazen display of power, Duryodhana shot a potent golden arrow that pierced Bhima's chest. Unfazed by the wound, Bhima retaliated by striking Duryodhana's arm joints with nine arrows. Witnessing this fierce clash between the two warriors, Duryodhana's brothers joined the fray, releasing a deluge of

arrows in an attempt to claim Bhima's life. Yet, with a sinister smile on his face, Bhima charged at them like a rampaging elephant in a sugar cane field. He first impaled Chitrangada with a long arrow and then pierced each of the other brothers with three arrows. Sensing the need for reinforcements, Yudhisthira dispatched Abhimanyu, accompanied by other valiant warriors, to assist Bhima in the fight. Seeing them approach, Dhritarashtra's sons abandoned their confrontation with Bhima and fled the battlefield.

Unwilling to let them escape unscathed, Bhimasena and Abhimanyu pursued them, issuing a challenge. Abhimanyu decimated Vikarna's four horses and showered him with twenty-five arrows. When his horses fell, Vikarna sought refuge on the chariot of his brother Chitrangada. Undeterred, Abhimanyu continued his onslaught, raining arrows upon them. In an attempt to counter Abhimanyu, Durjaya and Vikarna unleashed nine iron arrows, hoping to bring him down. But Bhima stood firm like a mountain struck by a thunderbolt, unaffected by those arrows.

Meanwhile, the resounding twang of the Gandiva bow echoed from the right side of the army. In that part of the battlefield, headless corpses stood upright in the thousands. Arjuna was swiftly mowing down the enemy faster than the mind could comprehend. His bow moved in a perpetual circle, with his arm movements imperceptible. All that could be seen were countless arrows flying in every direction, and the lifeless bodies of elephants, horses, and men strewn across the field of battle.

As the day neared its end, King Duryodhana caught sight of Bhima and confronted him with a volley of deadly arrows. Backed by his brothers, Bhima boldly declared, "The long-awaited moment has arrived today. If you don't flee like a coward, I shall end your life. Your pride has brought humiliation upon us in the past. For all the offenses you have committed, I will make sure you die before the eyes of your kin." With these words, Bhima drew his bow to its full extent and unleashed a

thunderous barrage of thirty-six arrows. Four of his arrows claimed Duryodhana's horses, and two severed the royal umbrella and standard from his chariot, spreading panic among the Kaurava troops. Bhima then pierced Duryodhana with ten shafts, causing the King to slump into a lifeless stupor on the chariot's floor. Enraged by Bhima's audacity, Jayadratha, coming to Duryodhana's aid, encircled Bhima with thousands of chariots. But the son of Subhadra, the sons of Draupadi, and Dhrishtaketu rushed to protect Bhima. Abhimanyu struck Vikarna with broad-headed arrows resembling venomous snakes, ultimately killing his charioteer. Swift as a tiger, Abhimanyu unleashed fourteen arrows that pierced Vikarna's body and plunged into the earth, causing him to vomit blood. Determined to rescue their brother, the other sons of Dhritarashtra surrounded Abhimanyu, bombarding him with a torrent of weapons

The five valiant sons of Draupadi, Prativindya, Sutasoma, Srutakarman, Srutakirti, and Satanika, were fierce warriors, capable of decimating enemy ranks. As they approached the battlefield, Durmuka targeted Srutakarman, launching five arrows that pierced his body and severing his standard with another strike. Drawing closer, Durmuka swiftly dispatched all four of Srutakarman's horses. Undeterred, Srutakarman retaliated, unleashing a blazing dart that pierced through Durmuka's armor and sank into the earth. Sutasoma, the son of Bhima, swiftly took Srutakarman onto his chariot, and together they launched a fierce assault on the enemy forces. Meanwhile, Srutakirti, the son of Arjuna, confronted Jayatsena with the intention of ending his life. Sporting a sly smile, Jayatsena shattered Srutakirti's bow with a horseshoe-headed arrow. Incensed by this insolence, Satanika pierced Jayatsena with ten arrows and let out a resounding roar. Struck by the onslaught, Jayatsena slumped onto the floor of his chariot, unconscious and on the brink of death.

Witnessing the peril of Jayatsena, Dushkarna stepped forward to challenge Satanika, shouting, "Wait, wait!" With a calm and steady hand, Satanika swiftly severed Dushkarna's bow with a single arrow and dispatched his charioteer. Unleashing seven arrows, Satanika pierced Dushkarna's body, and with four more, he ended the lives of Dushkarna's four horses. Drawing his bowstring back to his ear, Satanika released a broadheaded arrow that pierced Dushkarna's chest, causing him to tumble from his chariot like a tree struck by lightning.

In another corner of the battlefield, the revered Grandsire Bhishma wreaked havoc upon the Pandava forces, leaving a trail of carnage in his wake. The battlefield was littered with lifeless bodies, and none dared to stand against him. Having shattered the Pandava's battle lines and with the sun descending on the horizon, Bhishma withdrew his troops and retired from the field. King Yudhisthira rejoiced in the day's victory. Bhima had dealt a crushing blow to the Kaurava army, and Yudhisthira embraced him, affectionately smelling his head. With the day's battles concluded, the weary troops retired to their tents, seeking much-needed rest.

Chapter 21

the 6th day

After a much-needed rest, both the Kurus and the Pandavas rose once again to face each other in the battlefield. The air echoed with the clamor of mighty charioteers preparing for war, the thunderous roar of war elephants being equipped, the clinking of armor as infantry donned their protective gear, and the resounding blast of conches and beating of drums that reverberated throughout the entire field. It was a symphony of chaos and impending doom.

King Yudhishthira, the just, turned to the mighty Dhrishtadyumna and commanded him, "O warrior of great strength, assemble the troops in the formidable Makara formation that will scorch our foes!" With Pritha's son's words fueling his determination, Dhrishtadyumna, a foremost warrior on chariots, issued the order to the charioteers to form the Makara formation.

At the head of the formation stood Drupada and Arjuna, the son of Pandu, their presence radiating power and confidence. Sahadeva and Nakula, like two watchful eyes, guarded the flanks, while the mighty Bhimasena, fierce and unyielding, formed the beak of the Makara. Subhadra's valiant son, the sons of Draupadi, the Rakshasa Ghatotkacha, and the indomitable Satyaki stood strong, forming its neck. King Virata, a commander of a vast division, stood at its back, supported by Dhrishtadyumna and a formidable force. The five Kekaya brothers formed the left wing, while Dhrishtaketu and the formidable Chekitana, exuding unmatched prowess, took their place in the right wing, ready to defend the formation. The two

feet of the Makara were composed of the blessed Kuntibhoja and the mighty Satanika, reinforced by a large force. Sikhandin, the unparalleled archer, surrounded by the brave Somakas, and the powerful Iravat, guarded the tail of the Makara formation.

With the formation assembled, the Pandavas, armored and ready for battle, marched forward, accompanied by elephants, horses, chariots, and infantry. The sight was awe-inspiring as their standards fluttered proudly and their umbrellas adorned the battlefield. Armed with gleaming, sharpened weapons, they advanced swiftly toward the Kauravas.

In response, Devavrata, thy sire, surveyed the Pandava army, arranged in their imposing Makara formation, and organized his own troops accordingly, forming a counter-array resembling a colossal crane. Bharadwaja's son, Drona, occupied the beak, while Aswatthaman and Kripa stood as the eyes. Kritavarman, the supreme archer, supported by the rulers of the Kamvojas and the Valhikas, held the head of the crane formation. Surrounded by numerous kings, Surasena and thy son Duryodhana were stationed in the neck. Susarman, the king of Prasthala, bolstered by his own forces, guarded the left wing, and the Tusharas, Yavanas, Sakas, and Chulikas formed the right wing under the leadership of the valiant warriors.

The rear of the formation was protected by Srutayush, Sataytish, and Somadatta's son, standing united to defend against any threats. The Kaurava army, led by Bhishma, Kripa, Drona, Salya, Duryodhana, and others, shone like the star-studded firmament. Bhimasena, the mighty son of Kunti, caught sight of Drona and surged forward, his steeds carrying him swiftly into the heart of the battle.

Drona, driven by wrath and possessing immense power, unleashed a barrage of nine iron-tipped arrows upon Bhima, aiming to strike his vital points. Pierced deeply by Bharadwaja's son, Bhima retaliated by sending Drona's charioteer to the realm of Yama, the lord of death. In turn, Bharadwaja's son,

restraining his steeds, engulfed the Pandava army like a ravenous fire devouring a heap of cotton. As Drona and Bhishma wreaked havoc upon the Srinjayas and the Kekayas, panic seized their ranks, and they fled from the battlefield. Likewise, the Pandava forces, under the relentless assault of Bhima and Arjuna, overwhelmed the Kaurava soldiers, leaving them dazed and helpless like a beautiful maiden stripped of her pride.

In this fierce conflict, both armies clashed with unyielding resolve, disregarding their own lives. The sun ascended the sky, illuminating the battlefield as elephants charged against elephants, horsemen clashed with horsemen, and charioteers engaged in relentless combat against both cavalry and elephant riders. Car-warriors clashed with foot soldiers, and cavalry clashed with infantry. The warriors, fueled by their wrath, clashed against each other in a spectacular spectacle of might and fury.

The Pandava army, led by Bhimasena, Arjuna, and the courageous twins, shone brilliantly, resembling the night sky adorned with twinkling stars. Simultaneously, the Kaurava forces, with Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Salya, Duryodhana, and others in the forefront, gleamed like the firmament, studded with celestial bodies.

It was a brutal, heart-wrenching conflict, where heroes on both sides fought fiercely, each countering the other's weapons. The Pandavas and the Kauravas clashed with unyielding determination, and the field was painted red with the blood of warriors.

Chapter 21

The 7th Days Battle

The battlefield was a spectacle of chaos and valor as the mighty warriors clashed with each other, their weapons clashing and arrows raining down like a torrential storm. Drona, with his unparalleled archery skills, unleashed a barrage of arrows upon King Virata, aiming to pierce his armor and strike him down. Ashvatthama, filled with fury, charged at Shikhandi, seeking to vanquish him in battle. Duryodhana, driven by his determination to defeat the Pandavas, engaged in a fierce duel with Dhrishtadyumna, the commander of the Pandava forces.

Meanwhile, Nakula and Sahadeva, the valiant twins, confronted the formidable Salya, the ruler of Madras, while Vinda and Anuvinda, the princes of Avanti, clashed with Iravan, the son of Arjuna. In another corner of the battlefield, several kings joined forces and attacked Arjuna, knowing well the immense challenge they faced against the Pandava hero.

Bhima, the strongest of the Pandavas, engaged in a brutal combat with Bhurishrava, a renowned warrior from the Kaurava side. Abhimanyu, the young and fearless son of Arjuna, faced the sons of Dhritarashtra, led by Vikarna, Chitrangada, and Durmarshana. The battlefield resonated with the clash of weapons and the cries of warriors as they fought with unmatched determination.

Ghatotkacha, the Rakshasa prince and son of Bhima, confronted Bhagadatta, the mighty ruler of Pragjyotishapura, in a fierce battle. The powerful Rakshasa Alambhusha clashed with the indomitable Satyaki, displaying their immense strength and skill. King Yudhishthira, guided by righteousness, engaged in a fierce duel with Kripa, one of the revered warriors on the Kaurava side.

The battlefield became a canvas of epic confrontations, each warrior displaying their prowess and valor. The clash between the Pandavas and the Kauravas intensified, and the fate of the war hung in the balance as heroes on both sides fought with unwavering determination and indomitable spirit.

As the battle raged on, Arjuna found himself surrounded by thousands of kings on their majestic chariots, all eager to engage him in combat. Undeterred, Arjuna calmly turned to Krishna, his charioteer, and pointed out the King of the Trigaratas and his brothers, expressing his determination to send them to the realm of death that very day. With confidence and resolve, Arjuna strung his bow and unleashed a barrage of arrows in response to the oncoming warriors. The sky was filled with a flurry of arrows as both sides exchanged their deadly projectiles.

Witnessing Arjuna's awe-inspiring display of skill and bravery, the demigods and sages watching from the heavens marveled at his prowess. Fueled by anger, Arjuna invoked the powerful aindra weapon, which pierced through the defenses of the opposing warriors, inflicting wounds and claiming lives. Overwhelmed by the relentless assault of Arjuna's arrows, the remaining soldiers sought the protection of Bhishma, who became their shield against the onslaught of Arjuna's might.

In another part of the battlefield, Drona, the preceptor, engaged in a fierce duel with King Virata of the Matsyas. Drona swiftly struck down Virata's banner with one arrow and his bow with another. Undeterred, Virata quickly picked up a stronger bow and retaliated, piercing Drona with three arrows, his horses with four, and his charioteer with two. Enraged by these attacks, Drona retaliated by killing Virata's four horses and his charioteer. Virata, now left without a chariot, mounted his son Sankha's chariot, and together they fought against the relentless Drona. However, Drona released a potent arrow that pierced Sankha's armor, ending his life. Overwhelmed by grief and fear, Virata fled the battlefield, leaving it in the hands of Drona.

Simultaneously, Shikhandi confronted Ashvatthama, the son of Drona, and pierced him with three arrows to the forehead. Filled with fury, Ashvatthama retaliated by killing Shikhandi's horses and charioteer. Undeterred, Shikhandi dismounted from his now disabled chariot and armed himself with a scimitar and shield, charging at Ashvatthama like a hawk pouncing on its prey. Ashvatthama, unable to find an opening, unleashed a volley of arrows, but Shikhandi skillfully deflected them with his scimitar. Failing in his attempt, Ashvatthama shattered Shikhandi's sword and shield with more arrows. Left with only the hilt of his broken sword, Shikhandi hurled it at Ashvatthama with all his might. However, Ashvatthama swiftly cut the weapon to pieces and relentlessly pursued Shikhandi on foot. At that critical moment, Satyaki, another formidable warrior, appeared on the scene, rescuing Shikhandi by taking him aboard his chariot and saving him from Ashvatthama's onslaught.

After being provided with another chariot, Satyaki rejoined the fierce battle and confronted the prince of the Rakshasas, Alambusha. The cruel Rakshasa shattered Satyaki's bow and pierced him with numerous arrows. Employing mystic illusions, Alambusha showered Satyaki's chariot with a barrage of weapons. However, undeterred, Satyaki called upon the powerful aindra weapon given to him by Arjuna, dispelling the Rakshasa's illusion. Satyaki's arrows covered Alambusha's chariot, instilling great fear in him, causing him to flee to another part of the battlefield. With no formidable opponent to challenge him, Satyaki, a descendant of Madhu, proceeded to decimate the Kaurava divisions, wreaking havoc on their forces.

Dhristadyumna engaged in a playful encounter with the royal son of Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana, akin to a lion playing with a mouse. Enraged by the audacity of his enemy, Duryodhana unleashed a volley of sixty arrows followed by thirty more at Dhristadyumna, the son of Drupada. However, Dhristadyumna swiftly killed Duryodhana's four horses and his charioteer.

Undeterred, Duryodhana dismounted from his chariot, armed himself with a sword and shield, and charged toward Dhristadyumna. But Shakuni swiftly intervened, escorting the king to another part of the battlefield, sparing him from Dhristadyumna's wrath. Following this encounter, Dhristadyumna began decimating the enemy troops, slaying thousands of soldiers.

Bhima, the mighty son of Kunti, faced an attack from Kritavarman, who showered him with arrows, covering him from head to toe. Laughing in response, Bhima fiercely struck Kritavarman with numerous sharp weapons, killing his horses and charioteer, and eventually forcing him out of his chariot. With arrows protruding from his body, Kritavarman, feeling greatly afflicted, sought refuge on the chariot of Vrishaka. Bhimasena, fueled by rage, relentlessly ravaged the enemy ranks with his mighty club.

In another part of the battlefield, the two kings of Avantipura, Vinda and Anuvinda, engaged in combat with Arjuna's son, Iravan. They fiercely clashed, each desiring to claim the other's life. The intensity of their confrontation left onlookers in awe. Iravan succeeded in killing Anuvinda's four horses and shattering his bow, prompting Anuvinda to seek refuge on his brother's chariot. Together, they fought against Arjuna's son, but Iravan proved to be a formidable opponent. He killed their charioteer, causing the horses to run wild and carry them away from the battlefield. With no one to oppose him, Iravan proceeded to slaughter the Kaurava ranks.

The prince of the Rakshasas, Ghatotkacha, challenged the ruler of Pragjyotishapura, Bhagadatta, who was mounted on his magnificent white elephant named Supritika. The Pandava forces trembled in fear as they witnessed the immense and seemingly invincible elephant wreaking havoc wherever it went, causing great devastation among Yudhishthira's troops. Amidst the chaos, Ghatotkacha rallied his troops and launched a fierce attack on Bhagadatta, showering him with various weapons.

Bhagadatta retaliated with a barrage of arrows, inflicting severe pain on Bhima's son. The ruler of Pragjyotishapura then forcefully released seven javelins that streaked through the sky like meteors, but Ghatotkacha skillfully intercepted and destroyed them with his arrows. In response, Bhima's son pierced Bhagadatta with seventy arrows, each resembling bolts of lightning. Laughing as if invincible, the Pragjyotish King unleashed four arrows that killed Ghatotkacha's horses. Ghatotkacha countered by launching a powerful dart that streaked through the sky. However, before it could reach its target, Bhagadatta divided the dart into three pieces, causing Bhima's son to retreat from the battlefield. With no opposition, King Bhagadatta trampled the Pandava troops with his colossal elephant, furthering the chaos and destruction.

Salya, the ruler of Madras, confronted his nephews Nakula and Sahadeva in battle. Salya deprived Nakula of his chariot, prompting Nakula to join Sahadeva on his chariot. Filled with anger at his defeat, Sahadeva placed a broad-headed arrow on his bow and released it with full force, piercing through Salya's body and entering the earth. Salya fell unconscious on the terrace of his chariot and was swiftly removed from the battlefield. Sahadeva and Nakula then commenced a relentless assault, decimating the Kaurava soldiers by the hundreds and thousands.

King Yudhisthira encountered the powerful warrior Shrutayush and struck him with numerous arrows. In response, Shrutayush released seven arrows that pierced Yudhisthira's armor and drew his blood. Enraged by this, Yudhisthira killed Shrutayush's chariot horses and charioteer. He then launched a long shafted arrow that struck Shrutayush in the chest, leaving him senseless but not dead. With this victory, Yudhisthira proceeded to slay the countless troops that had supported Shrutayush.

Chekitana, belonging to the Vrishni lineage, showered the preceptor Kripa with a barrage of long shafted arrows. In retaliation, Kripa severed Chekitana's bow into pieces. The son of Saradwat then killed Chekitana's horses and charioteer. Brandishing his mace, Chekitana, a descendant of the Vrishni clan, killed the horses of Kripa's chariot and his charioteer. Dismounting from his chariot, Kripa shot sixteen arrows at Chekitana, piercing the Vrishni hero's armor and striking the ground. Unyielding despite being pierced, Chekitana hurled his mace with great force at Kripacharya. However, Kripa effortlessly shattered the weapon, leaving Chekitana weaponless. Determined, Chekitana charged at Kripacharya with his drawn saber, and the two warriors engaged in a fierce swordfight. Inflicting cuts upon each other, they eventually collapsed on the ground, exhausted and bleeding. They were rescued by other chariot warriors and taken away from the battlefield.

In a remarkable turn of events, Abhimanyu confronted three of Duryodhana's brothers, Chitrangada, Vikarna, and Durmarshana, who were protected by golden armor and wielding powerful weapons. Abhimanyu swiftly disarmed them of their chariots but refrained from killing them, remembering the oath his uncle Bhima had taken in the Kaurava court.

Meanwhile, Arjuna, the son of Kunti, encountered his grandsire Bhishma during the tumultuous battle. He instructed Lord Krishna to drive the horses towards Bhishma, who was unleashing a barrage of arrows and seemed invincible with his supporting warriors. As Arjuna approached the enemy ranks, the Kaurava army trembled in fear. King Susharman, supported by numerous chariot fighters, rushed to protect Bhishma and attacked Arjuna with the force of a tempest. However, the mighty Arjuna swiftly shattered their bows, severed their limbs and heads, leaving them lifeless in their chariots. Witnessing the massacre of his supporting chariot fighters, Susharman, the King of the Trigartas, called upon his thirty-two best chariot warriors to attack Arjuna. They unleashed a torrent of weapons, but

Arjuna dispatched all of them to the realm of death with sixty arrows.

After defeating King Susharman and his division, Arjuna continued his advance towards Grandfather Bhishma. Duryodhana and Jayadratha stepped forward to aid Bhishma, but Arjuna skillfully avoided them and swiftly proceeded towards the son of Ganga. Yudhisthira, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva joined Arjuna in the attack on their grandfather. Despite the relentless assault, Bhishma stood firm and unwavering. Jayadratha and Duryodhana joined forces to support Bhishma, and Duryodhana unleashed flaming arrows that pierced each of the five Pandavas. Jayadratha also shattered Shikhandi's powerful bow. Filled with fear, Shikhandi began to retreat from the battlefield, but Yudhisthira called out to him, reminding him of the vow he had taken to slay Bhishma in the presence of all the heroes. Yudhisthira urged him not to run away and instead exhibit his prowess.

Encouraged by Yudhisthira's words, Shikhandi returned to the battlefield and confronted Bhishma. However, Salya intervened between the two heroes and unleashed a barrage of formidable weapons that were difficult to counter. As the fiery weapons rained down upon him, Shikhandi invoked the Varuna weapon, neutralizing those attacks. Bhishma destroyed Yudhisthira's bow and severed the banner of his chariot. In order to protect his elder brother, Bhima descended from his chariot, wielding his mace. While Bhima rushed towards Bhishma, Jayadratha showered him with five hundred arrows from all directions. Undeterred by the onslaught, Bhima killed Jayadratha's horses. Chitrangada, the son of Dhritarastra, came forward to confront Bhima. But Bhima turned his attention to Chitrangada, instilling fear in the hearts of his supporting soldiers with his mighty mace. Bhima then hurled his mace with great force, demolishing Chitrangada's chariot, driver, and horses. Vikarna arrived with

his own chariot, allowing Chitrangada to quickly ascend it and be taken to safety.

Grandfather Bhishma launched an attack on Yudhisthira, and it seemed that the eldest son of Kunti had entered the jaws of death. Bhishma covered Yudhisthira with a shower of arrows, making him invisible amidst the barrage. Yudhisthira responded with a blazing arrow resembling fire, but Bhishma swiftly cut it in two before it could reach him. Bhishma then killed Yudhisthira's horses, prompting him to ascend Nakula's chariot. Yudhisthira, Nakula, and Sahadeva, along with their supporting troops, rushed at Bhishma. Bhishma unleashed a storm of thousands of arrows upon the oncoming warriors, causing a great slaughter. He appeared like a young lion amidst a herd of deer, and the heads of many heroic chariot fighters fell to the ground, throwing the entire Pandava army into disarray. Shikhandi, who was destined to slay Bhishma, charged at the grandsire, shouting, "Wait, Wait!" However, Bhishma disregarded Shikhandi due to his previous identity as a woman and pressed forward against the Shrinjayas. The great heroes fought fiercely until the sun began to set on the horizon.

With darkness descending upon the battlefield, all the warriors returned to their respective camps. They tended to their wounds, pulled out the arrows lodged in their bodies, and rested for the night. The slaughter had taken a heavy toll on both sides, and blood flowed like water. As the warriors left the battlefield, jackals and Rakshasas arrived to feast upon the bodies of the fallen soldiers

Chapter 22

Iravan is Slain

When the sun rose on the eighth day, the Pandavas and the Kauravas clashed once again in a battle that would shake the very foundations of the earth. King Duryodhana, with his fierce warriors Chitrangada Vivinsati, Bhishma, and Drona, formed a formation that resembled an unstoppable tidal wave. At the forefront stood the indomitable Grandsire Bhishma, supported by the relentless Duryodhana and his brothers. Kripa and Drona stood next to Bhishma, bolstered by countless troops. On the other side, the son of Drona, Ashvatthama, alongside Salya and Kritavarman, prepared to face the Kaurava forces.

Witnessing the formidable array of the Kaurava army, Dhristadyumna swiftly organized his troops into a counter

formation known as the shringataka, designed to quell hostile forces. The horns of this formation were none other than the mighty Bhima and the valiant descendant of Vrishni, Satyaki. Alongside them stood the resolute Arjuna, guided by the Supreme Personality of Godhead himself as his charioteer. In the center of the formation stood King Yudhisthira and the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva. Behind these fearless warriors were Abhimanyu, Virata, and Ghatotkacha, supported by millions upon millions of brave soldiers.

And so, the battle commenced, and the two armies collided, raising a massive cloud of dust that obscured the sun. The heroic Bhishma unleashed a storm of arrows from his formidable bow, mowing down the enemy troops with unmatched ferocity. The Somakas and the Shrinjayas, fully aware that death awaited them, fearlessly charged at Bhishma, for there is no greater glory for a warrior than to meet their end on the battlefield, especially at the hands of a legendary warrior like Bhishma. As in the previous days, the Grandsire unleashed his celestial weapons, decimating the opposition without mercy. No one could stand against him except Bhima, who dared to challenge the might of Bhishma himself.

But the sons of Dhritarastra, fueled by fury and vengeance, rushed to protect Bhishma, raining down a torrent of arrows upon Bhima. Undeterred, Bhima struck a fatal blow, severing Bhishma's charioteer, causing the horses to go berserk and carry the chariot away from the battlefield. Enraged by this audacity, Duryodhana's brothers, Adityaketu, Vahvasin, Kundadahara, Mahodara, Aparajita, Panditaka, and Visalakha, launched a relentless assault on Bhima, their chariots charging forward like thunderbolts. Mahodara pierced Bhima with nine arrows, each as fierce as a lightning bolt. Adityaketu unleashed seventy shafts upon him, Kundadahara unleashed ninety, and Visalakha struck him with seven arrows. The remaining brothers also joined the onslaught, determined to end the life of Bhimasena.

But Bhima would not tolerate his cousins' insolence. With an arrow shaped like a horseshoe, he severed the head of Sunabha, the beautiful adornments on his severed head tumbling to the ground. Infuriated, the brothers, fueled by rage, intensified their attack, their chariots closing in on Bhima. Undeterred, Vrikodara released a powerful arrow that severed Aparajita's head, putting an end to his arrogant existence. With a broad-headed arrow, the second son of Kunti, unleashed a lethal strike that penetrated the chest of Panditaka, his lifeless body crashing to the ground. Visalakha met a similar fate as three arrows severed his head, leaving him lifeless on the battlefield.

With lightning force, Bhima vanquished Mahodara with a long-shafted arrow, and Adityaketu met his demise at the hands of a broad-headed arrow. Vahvasin fell to Bhima's onslaught, his life extinguished by a well-aimed arrow. Witnessing the fall of their brothers, fear gripped the hearts of the remaining sons of Dhritarastra. They remembered the oath Bhima had taken in the midst of the Kaurava assembly, and the weight of their past transgressions bore heavily upon them. With trembling hearts, they turned their backs on the battlefield, fleeing from the wrath of Bhima.

The battlefield was a sight of carnage, strewn with the fallen warriors from both sides. Blood stained the earth, and the air was heavy with the stench of death. The respite of the night allowed the warriors to tend to their wounds, remove arrows lodged in their bodies, and prepare for the next day's onslaught. The casualties had taken a toll on both armies, but neither side showed any signs of retreat or surrender.

When Duryodhana witnessed the merciless slaughter of his eight brothers at the hands of Bhima, grief consumed his heart. Vidura's wise words echoed in his mind, as did the counsel of the Kuru elders. He knew in his core that Bhima, the second son of Kunti, had been destined to bring about his downfall. Filled

with anguish, he commanded his troops, "There stands Bhima, kill him!" With the order given, Duryodhana sought solace in the presence of Bhishma, pouring out his sorrow.

"Eight of my brothers have fallen, slain by Bhima even as you watched, Grandsire," Duryodhana lamented, his voice heavy with pain. "Our brave soldiers fight valiantly, yet they are being mercilessly butchered. It seems you have become an indifferent spectator in this battle. Fate is undeniably cruel to me."

The Grandsire's eyes welled with tears upon hearing Duryodhana's mournful words. His voice quivered as he addressed his grandson, "We warned you about this, but you failed to comprehend. I, myself, along with Drona, Vidura, and your mother Gandhari, urged you to make peace with the Pandavas, but you paid no heed. It is foretold that neither Drona nor I shall survive this battle. I speak the truth when I say that whoever meets Bhima's gaze shall not escape with their life. Therefore, O King, be patient and fight on, aiming for the heavenly abodes. As for the Pandavas, even all the demigods combined cannot slay them."

Dhritarastra, weighed down by grief, addressed Sanjaya, "O Sanjaya, witnessing my sons being slain by a single individual has sapped my strength and made my body tremble. Day after day, my sons meet their demise. It appears that they have been overtaken by the relentless force of time. Despite being protected by Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Bhurishrava, and Ashvatthama, they still fall. My wicked son refused to heed the wisdom of the Kuru elders and is now reaping the bitter fruit of his sinful actions."

Sanjaya replied, "O Monarch, you were warned repeatedly by the righteous Vidura. He pleaded with you to restrain your malevolent sons from the treacherous game of dice, but you turned a deaf ear. The outcome of this battle is the consequence of ignoring the sagacious Vidura's counsel. Now, O King, listen to the unfolding events of the battle as they transpired."

Having spoken to his grandson, Bhishma once again issued his challenge to the Pandava army. Yudhisthira, Dhristadyumna, Shikhandi, Satyaki, Virata, Drupada, Dhristaketu, and Kuntibhoja stood in opposition. They were supported by the mighty Somakas, the indomitable Shrinjayas, and the valiant Matsyas. Arjuna, along with the sons of Draupadi and Chekitana, faced the Kaurava army led by Duryodhana. Bhima, Abhimanyu, and Ghatotkacha confronted the rest of the Kaurava forces.

The esteemed chariot warrior, Drona, fueled by wrath, embarked on a relentless slaughter of the Somakas and the Shrinjayas. The warriors struck down by Drona lay scattered on the battlefield, their severed heads, arms, and legs painting a gruesome picture. The wounded moaned and shrieked, their cries piercing the air.

Bhima descended upon the Kaurava's elephant division, his arrows severing trunks and mutilating their colossal bodies. The earth was littered with the fallen giants, some paralyzed, others only half-dead, writhing in excruciating agony.

Nakula and Sahadeva, with deadly shafts in hand, targeted the cavalry division, decimating thousands of horsemen. Horse and rider met their demise, as the sons of Madri left a trail of destruction in their wake.

The mighty warrior, Iravan, born of the union between Arjuna and Ulupi, hailed from the Naga race. Growing up under the care of his mother in the land of the Nagas, he longed to meet his renowned father. When he learned that Arjuna had ascended to the heavenly realms, Iravan embarked on a journey to reunite with him. Standing before his father, he spoke with reverence, "I am Iravan, your son, begotten by Ulupi." Arjuna, overwhelmed with joy, embraced Iravan, and they spent precious moments together. Before departing the celestial abode, Arjuna implored his son, "When the great battle ensues, I will need your assistance."

Pledging his unwavering support, Iravan vowed, "Upon your command, I shall come to aid you." And now, as the battle raged, Iravan proved to be a valuable asset. Accompanied by a legion of celestial horses, endowed with the power to traverse any terrain and trample enemy soldiers and horsemen, he arrived at Kurukshetra. In the heat of the clash, Iravan shattered the enemy lines and wreaked havoc upon their ranks. The younger brothers of Shakuni, known as Gaya, Gavaksha, Vrishava, Charmavat, Arjava, and Suka, rose to the challenge and confronted him, bolstered by their own troops. The soldiers from Gandhara, eager for the fray, tore through the defenses of the Pandavas.

Iravan, commanding his men, engaged them in a fierce battle. Slowly but surely, his divisions gained the upper hand, much to the fury of Shakuni's brothers. Enraged, they launched a relentless assault on Arjuna's son, unleashing a volley of lances and arrows, striking him from multiple angles. Undeterred, Iravan yanked the projectiles from his body and hurled them back at Shakuni's kin with resolute force. Dismounting from his chariot, he brandished his sword and shield, taking the fight head-on. Shakuni's brothers encircled him, intending to capture him alive. However, as they closed in, Iravan swiftly severed their right and left arms, leaving their bodies mutilated. Life drained from their wretched forms as they tumbled from their chariots, their futile attempts to subdue Arjuna's valiant son proven futile. Only Vrishava, battered by numerous wounds, managed to escape the clutches of death.

Witnessing the slaughter of his brothers, Duryodhana commanded the Rakshasa prince, Alambhusha, to eliminate Iravan. "Behold, O hero, Arjuna's son wreaking havoc upon our forces with his mystic powers of illusion. You, too, possess profound knowledge of mystic arts. Waste no time and do what is necessary to protect our soldiers." Obeying Duryodhana's order, Alambhusha, the fearsome Rakshasa, unleashed his awe-inspiring illusions. He conjured a horde of formidable horses ridden by ferocious Rakshasas armed with spears and battle axes, numbering two thousand. Swiftly, they descended upon Iravan.

Yet, their hopes were shattered as Arjuna's son swiftly vanquished them.

Undeterred, Alambhusha confronted Iravan, unleashing his arrows that thrived on the taste of blood. But Iravan, with his razor-sharp blade, sliced through the arrows and shattered Alambhusha's bow. Witnessing his weapon destroyed, the Rakshasa ascended into the skies, conjuring an array of mystic illusions. Iravan, undaunted, soared into the heavens and engaged in a fierce aerial clash with the enigmatic Rakshasa. Severing his foe's arms and slashing at his body, Iravan fought with unwavering determination, unyielding in his pursuit of victory.

As the battle between Iravan and Alambhusha intensified, the Rakshasa utilized his mystic powers to regenerate his severed arms, continually renewing his offensive. Iravan, wielding his battle axe with unwavering skill, inflicted deep wounds upon his adversary, causing torrents of blood to flow. In a desperate bid to capture Iravan, Alambhusha expanded his form, seeking to ensnare the valiant warrior. However, Iravan, channeling his own mystical abilities, conjured illusions that confounded the Rakshasa's senses.

Witnessing his son's struggle, a celestial serpent from Iravan's Naga lineage manifested itself. Taking on a form reminiscent of Lord Ananta, the serpent summoned a legion of Nagas to assail the colossal Rakshasa. A fierce battle ensued, with the Nagas launching relentless attacks upon their formidable adversary. In a surprising turn of events, Alambhusha momentarily contemplated his options before assuming the form of Garuda, the divine eagle, devouring the mystical serpents summoned by Iravan.

Iravan, witnessing the celestial serpent's defeat, found himself bewildered by the turn of events. Seizing this opportune moment, Alambhusha swiftly swung his mighty sword, severing Iravan's

head from his valiant shoulders. The lifeless body of Arjuna's son fell to the ground, as the Kaurava army erupted in jubilation. Emboldened by this victory, they surged forward, relentlessly pushing against the battle lines of their enemies. The loss of Iravan dealt a heavy blow to the Pandavas, and the tides of the conflict began to sway in favor of the Kauravas.

Chapter 23

Ghatotkacha fights Bhagadatta and Duryodhana humiliated

As Ghatotkacha, Bhima's mighty son, beheld the lifeless body of Iravan on the battlefield, a surge of rage engulfed him. Without hesitation, he issued a challenge to Duryodhana, unleashing a relentless volley of hundreds of arrows. Duryodhana, accompanied by a formidable elephant division led by the King of the Vangas, accepted the challenge, determined to quell the fury of Bhima's son.

Roaring with immense power, Ghatotkacha instilled terror in the hearts of Duryodhana's troops. The Rakshasa division, under his command, launched a fierce assault on the elephant army,

unleashing a massacre upon the mighty beasts. With their array of weapons—arrows, swords, darts, maces, and battle axes—the Rakshasas struck down the colossal elephants as though they were feeble trees caught in a tempest. However, Duryodhana, unwilling to tolerate this onslaught, took matters into his own hands, slaying four of the prominent Rakshasa warriors: Vegavat, Maharudra, Vidyujihva, and Pramathin.

Bhima's son, fueled by fury, seized a colossal dart, intending to end Duryodhana's life. Yet, the King of the Vangas, positioned atop his elephant, valiantly interposed himself between Duryodhana's chariot and the imminent danger. Ghatotkacha unleashed his dart, which pierced the heart of the elephant, causing it to collapse lifelessly to the ground. Undeterred, the King of the Vangas swiftly mounted another mighty elephant, his eyes aflame with wrath. Meanwhile, Ghatotkacha assumed a terrifying form, his roars reverberating through the battlefield, shaking the very foundations of the earth.

Upon hearing these thunderous sounds, Bhishma issued orders to Drona, Kripa, Salya, Somadatta, Balhika, Jayadratha, Bhurishrava, and other renowned warriors to protect the embattled King. Vinda and Anuvinda, Ashvatthama, Vikarna, Chitrangada, and Vivinsati followed closely behind. Calm amidst the chaos, Ghatotkacha greeted them with a relentless hail of arrows. He shattered Drona's bow and toppled the standard on Somadatta's chariot. Balhika suffered multiple arrow wounds, while Kripa was struck by a single piercing shaft. Vikarna was pierced in the shoulder joint, his wound gushing blood and flesh, forcing him to retreat to the floor of his chariot.

Unleashing ten arrows that pierced Bhurishrava's body and vanished into the earth, Ghatotkacha then severed Jayadratha's bow and decimated the steeds of the Avantipura kings. Having vanquished those warriors, he surged forward to confront Duryodhana, his intent to end the Kuru king's life. However, countless heroes valiantly rushed to protect Duryodhana, encircling Ghatotkacha and launching their weapons in unison.

Undeterred, Ghatotkacha ascended into the sky, emitting a thunderous roar that sent tremors through the hearts of the Kaurava warriors.

Hearing the resounding roars, Yudhisthira, filled with concern, urgently implored his younger brother Bhima, "The ferocious roars of your mighty son indicate that he is locked in combat with the foremost Kuru soldiers. The burden upon him appears overwhelming. Waste no time, swiftly rescue him from imminent peril!" Responding to his brother's command, Bhima charged into battle, followed by a host of chariot fighters. Bhima unleashed earth-shaking screams that struck fear into the hearts of the Kaurava heroes, meeting them head-on and shattering the backbone of their fierce army. Accompanied by a multitude of soldiers, he pierced through enemy lines, his sharpened arrows claiming the lives of hundreds of men in their wake.

Upon witnessing his troops in disarray, Duryodhana, determined to halt Bhimasena's progress, launched a ferocious assault on him. He showered Pandu's son with a relentless barrage of arrows, shattering his bow into fragments. In a treacherous move, the crooked son of Dhritarashtra pierced Bhima's chest with an arrow, causing him to clutch the pole of his chariot in pain. Enraged by this act, Ghatotkacha and Abhimanyu rose to challenge Duryodhana's audacity.

Sensing the impending danger to their king, Drona swiftly commanded the likes of Somadatta, Kripa, Bhurishravas, Ashvatthama, Jayadratha, and Brihadvala to come to Duryodhana's aid. Drona himself released a volley of twenty-six arrows that pierced Bhima, while in retaliation, Bhima struck Drona with ten shafts, sending the preceptor crashing onto the floor of his chariot. Descending from his chariot, Bhima grasped his mace and charged at Drona, intent on slaying him. The mighty Kauravas, seeking to eliminate Bhima, surrounded him and unleashed a relentless onslaught of weapons upon him.

In the midst of the chaos, a king named Nila confronted Ashvatthama, who was targeting Bhima. Nila showered Drona's son with numerous winged arrows, causing blood to flow from his body. Filled with fury, Ashvatthama killed Nila's horses and charioteer before releasing a single arrow that pierced Nila's chest, leaving him slumped in his chariot. Ghatotkacha swiftly came to Nila's defense, prompting Ashvatthama to challenge him to battle. The son of Drona killed several Rakshasas supporting Ghatotkacha, provoking the wrath of the mighty Rakshasa. Ghatotkacha created a multitude of terrifying illusions that bewildered Ashvatthama. The illusions spread across the battlefield, casting a veil of terror upon the Kaurava army. Unable to counter the illusions, the Kauravas fled in fear. Thousands of warriors succumbed to the mystic powers of Ghatotkacha, their heads, legs, and arms severed from their bodies. Even Drona, Duryodhana, Salya, and Ashvatthama retreated from the battlefield.

In an attempt to rally the troops, Bhishma shouted, "Do not flee! They are merely Rakshasa illusions!" However, his words fell on deaf ears as the soldiers did not return to the fight. The Pandavas, considering victory to be within their grasp, saw the mystic Ghatotkacha rout the Kaurava army, causing them to flee the battlefield as the sun began to set.

Witnessing the defeat of his army, Duryodhana approached Grandfather Bhishma with bitter words, expressing his distress, "Relying on your battle prowess, I initiated this animosity with the Pandavas. I have eleven akshauhini divisions under your command, yet I am being defeated by the Pandava warriors led by Bhima and Ghatotkacha. This fills me with anxiety and burns my body. Therefore, I implore you to kill Ghatotkacha, and thus my desires shall be fulfilled."

In response to Duryodhana's rebuke, Bhishma advised him, "Listen, O King, to my counsel. In all circumstances, your protection in battle should be paramount. Kings should engage with kings, so you should face Yudhisthere

As per Duryodhana's command, King Bhagadatta swiftly proceeded to confront Ghatotkacha, supported by his mighty elephant named Supratika. Bhima, Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha, the sons of Draupadi, Satyadriti, Kshatradeva, and Vasudhama prepared themselves for the battle upon seeing Bhagadatta approach. Bhagadatta unleashed a barrage of arrows, striking Bhima, but in retaliation, Bhima killed one hundred warriors supporting Bhagadatta. Bhima, along with the Kekaya brothers, Abhimanyu, and the ruler of Dasharanas, encircled the elephant Supratika and launched numerous weapons at it. Although blood and flesh flowed from its wounds, the elephant stood firm. The ruler of the Dasharanas, riding on his own elephant, challenged Supratika's might but failed to dislodge it. In response, the ruler of Pragjyotishapura hurled fourteen lances in succession, piercing the elephant and forcing it to retreat from the battlefield. The elephant, now turning on the Pandava troops, trampled horses and chariots in its path. With Bhima leading them, the valiant warriors of the Pandava army rushed at the colossal elephant Supratika, intending to slay it. However, the formidable archer Bhagadatta fearlessly wreaked havoc on the Pandava forces, as the massive elephant crushed countless soldiers and chariots.

Witnessing the disarray of the Pandava army, Ghatotkacha, filled with determination, charged at Bhagadatta. He released a powerful dart that streaked through the sky like a meteor, but Bhagadatta swiftly countered by launching a golden arrow that shattered the dart into fragments. Encouraged by this success, Bhagadatta seized a massive lance and hurled it at Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha, rising into the air, caught the lance and shattered it with a resounding roar, earning the admiration of all warriors. Unperturbed by Ghatotkacha's defiance, the King of Pragjyotishapura pierced the warriors surrounding Ghatotkacha with numerous arrows. He killed Bhima's horses and gravely wounded Bhima's charioteer, Vishoka, who fell from the chariot. Descending from his chariot, Bhima brandished his mace and

unleashed a devastating assault on the enemy ranks, enduring the relentless attack of the indomitable Bhagadatta.

At this critical moment, Lord Krishna and Arjuna arrived on the scene. Bhima informed Arjuna of the death of his son Iravan at the hands of Alambhusha. Deeply aggrieved by the loss, Arjuna, addressing Krishna, expressed his resolve, "With Vidura's great wisdom, he foresaw the destruction of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Many great heroes have perished in pursuit of wealth. This warrior profession is futile. Due to Duryodhana's fault, the entire Kshatriya race will be decimated. I will slay these kin, who are Rakshasas disguised as humans. There is no time to waste, O Madhava."

The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna, swiftly drove the chariot to the forefront of the battle. He engaged in combat with Bhishma, Kripa, Bhagadatta, and Susharman. Meanwhile, Bhima confronted Drona and some of Duryodhana's brothers. In Drona's presence, Bhima slew them like a lion annihilating a flock of sheep. The names of the fallen brothers were Virudroksha, Kundalin, Anadriti, Kundavegan, Virata, Dhirgalochan, Dhirgavavahu, Suvahu, and Kankyadhaga. These nine brothers met their demise, falling from their chariots. Fearing for their lives, the other brothers of Duryodhana fled the battlefield, leaving Drona helpless and unable to intervene.

A brutal clash unfolded, turning the battlefield into a macabre spectacle that delighted the god of death, Yamaraja. The two armies clashed with ferocity, leaving behind a trail of carnage and destruction. They grappled with each other, tearing at hair and resorting to savage tactics using nails, teeth, fists, and knees. The lines between kin blurred as fathers killed sons and sons killed fathers. The field was littered with shattered swords adorned with pearl handles, expensive ornaments, broken bows, and arrows scattered like rain. Barbed darts, axes, maces, and spiked clubs lay amidst the decapitated bodies of fallen soldiers.

Limbs were shattered, heads crushed, and the earth stained with the blood of men, elephants, and horses. Chariots lay broken and piled upon one another, with lifeless chariot fighters entangled within. Their bloodied armor no longer shimmered under the sun, and the severed heads of mighty warriors were strewn across the plain, some still wearing crowns or turbans.

As darkness approached, the exhausted Kurus and Pandavas withdrew their battered divisions and retired to their tents, lamenting the loss of their brethren and troops. Duryodhana, accompanied by his loyal companions Duhshasana and Karna, sought solace in the presence of their respected grandfather, Bhishma. Duryodhana pleaded with Bhishma, declaring him as their protector and expressing his desire for the annihilation of the insignificant Pandavas. He urged Bhishma to show mercy and questioned why he had not yet killed their enemies. Duryodhana proposed allowing Karna to fight, confident in his ability to vanquish the Pandavas.

In response, Bhishma chastised Duryodhana, reminding him of Arjuna's past triumphs and invincibility. He recounted Arjuna's victories over Indra, his rescue of Duryodhana from the Gandharvas when Karna fled, and his defeat of the Kauravas in Virata's kingdom, where he stripped them of their dignity. Bhishma emphasized Arjuna's unparalleled skills, even recounting his conquest of heaven and his vanquishing of the invincible Nivitakavachas. He affirmed that no one could defeat Arjuna in battle, for Lord Krishna, the wielder of the discus, protected him. Bhishma acknowledged Krishna's infinite power and divine presence in every being, a truth confirmed by sages such as Narada, Asita, and Vyasa. Although aware of the futility of defeating the Pandavas, Bhishma vowed to fulfill Duryodhana's desire by engaging in a fierce battle the next day.

Overjoyed by the grandeur of Bhishma's vow, Duryodhana requested to safeguard the five arrows possessed by Bhishma, arrows rumored to possess the power to slay the Pandavas. Bhishma, pleased with Duryodhana's enthusiasm, entrusted him

with the arrows, and the king and his soldiers retired to their tents, awaiting the dawn of the next day's momentous battle.

Chapter 24

Night of the 8th day and a bit of a side track

Krishna, ever the astute strategist, quickly discerned the significance of the mystical arrows capable of slaying the Pandavas. He sought out Arjuna and wasted no time in revealing his plan. "Remember how you saved Duryodhana from the clutches of the formidable Gandharva king, Chitrangada? He swore to grant you a boon for your valiant deed," Krishna remarked, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

Arjuna nodded, intrigued by Krishna's proposal. "And what is it that you desire, my Lord?" he inquired, his curiosity piqued.

Krishna grinned mischievously. "I have a humble request, dear Arjuna. I implore you to approach Duryodhana and ask for the five arrows that Bhisma currently possesses."

Arjuna's eyebrows arched in surprise. "Is that all you seek? It seems a rather simple task," he commented, slightly taken aback by the seemingly straightforward nature of Krishna's request.

Krishna nodded. "Indeed, my friend. The acquisition of those arrows would be a perfect solution to our predicament."

Without hesitation, Arjuna ventured into the Kuru camp, reaching Duryodhana's tent. It was nighttime, and the customary rules of war forbade any hostilities during this period. Warriors from both sides seized the opportunity to socialize and bond

with their friends, setting aside their animosity, if only temporarily.

Arjuna's sudden appearance surprised Duryodhana, who regarded his cousin with a mix of curiosity and wariness. Arjuna opened the conversation with a reminder, "Do you recall how I came to your rescue when the Gandharvas had you in their clutches? You were generous enough to grant me a boon in return."

The memory of that incident rankled Duryodhana's pride, piercing his heart more deeply than any physical wound. He replied, begrudgingly, "Yes, I remember that unfortunate incident. I am a man of my word. I shall grant you whatever you desire, even if it means relinquishing the kingdom itself."

Arjuna smiled, a glimmer of mischief dancing in his eyes. "Dear cousin, the kingdom shall be won through the righteous path of Kshatriya dharma. However, my dearest friend Krishna has an unusual request. He asked me to approach you, leveraging the strength of this boon."

Duryodhana's interest was piqued, and he leaned forward, eager to hear the nature of Krishna's request. "Speak then, for I am ready to fulfill it."

Arjuna paused for a moment, allowing the tension to build, before finally revealing the seemingly innocuous demand. "Krishna desires the five arrows currently held by Bhisma. He wishes for them to be placed in his possession."

Duryodhana remained still, contemplating the situation. Slowly, he reached for the arrows, which were wrapped in a white chaddar, and handed them to Arjuna. As Arjuna accepted them with a smile, he made his exit, leaving Duryodhana deep in thought. The realization struck him: he had clung to those arrows, hoping to outmaneuver Krishna's schemes and prevent him from acquiring them through sympathetic Bhisma. Yet, in his attempt to deceive Krishna, he had inadvertently fallen into a

clever trap. Duryodhana poured himself a strong herbal Lasi, crafted from rare herbs, and took a long sip, contemplating the events that had led to his capture by the Gandharvas. He reclined on his bed, enveloped in thoughts of past and future battles, his mind teeming with both regret and determination.

Fate had it that a Brahmana arrived at Dhritarashtra's court, bringing with him news of the Pandavas' extraordinary experiences in the forest. He narrated the tales of Arjuna's celestial exploits and his acquisition of divine weaponry. Dhritarashtra, burdened by foreboding, listened intently, for he knew that the thirteenth year would witness a great battle, wherein his sons and kin would meet their doom.

Unbeknownst to them, Shakuni, ever the schemer, overheard the conversation between the Brahmana and the blind king. Immediately, he shared the details with Duryodhana and Karna, igniting a wicked scheme in their minds. The trio devised a plan to visit the Dvaitavana forest, nestled within the vast Kamyaka forest, under the pretext of inspecting the royal herds of cows. Their intention was to find the Pandavas, clad in tattered garments, and mercilessly mock their misfortune, aiming to humiliate them.

Armed with their malevolence, Shakuni, Duryodhana, and Karna approached the king, seeking permission to embark on their journey to Dvaitavana. Dhritarashtra, granting their request, gave his consent, setting in motion the malicious trio's expedition. The entourage that accompanied them was nothing short of grandeur, with eight thousand chariots, thirty thousand elephants, nine thousand horses, and countless foot soldiers.

In due time, they reached the enchanting Dvaitavana forest, which housed numerous herds of cows, numbering in the thousands. They meticulously inspected each herd, meticulously counting the cows therein. Close by, a picturesque lake awaited, prompting Duryodhana's command to erect tents by its serene

shores. However, when the servants dispatched by Duryodhana arrived at the lake, they were taken aback by the sight of Gandharvas descending from the celestial realms, filling the water with their ethereal presence.

Returning with this astonishing news, the servants informed Duryodhana of the heavenly inhabitants adorning the lake. Infuriated, the son of Dhritarashtra ordered his men to drive away the Gandharvas, determined to claim the territory for his own. The soldiers, obeying their master's command, approached the Dvaitavana lake and arrogantly demanded that the Gandharvas vacate the area, proclaiming, "The mighty King Duryodhana is coming here for sport! You must make way!"

The Gandharvas burst into laughter, mocking the foolishness of Duryodhana's demand. "Your senseless king must be devoid of any wisdom," they retorted, their voices laced with amusement. "Who is he to order the denizens of heaven to leave this place? Return to your king and inform him that we serve only one ruler, Indra, the king of heaven. If he dares to confront us, let him show his courage and face us!"

Thus chastised by the Gandharvas, the humiliated army retreated to the presence of the royal scion, Duryodhana himself. Anger coursed through his veins, and he commanded his soldiers to prepare for battle. Once all preparations were complete, the Kuru army set forth toward the Dvaitavana lake, undeterred by the warnings of the Gandharvas guarding the entrance. Their defiance only fueled the Kuru host, led by the indomitable duo of Duryodhana and Karna, who brushed off the Gandharvas' admonitions and ventured deeper into the lakeside territory.

As news of the Kuru army's advance reached Chitrangada, the Gandharva king, he wasted no time in rallying his forces. With fierce determination, the Gandharvas launched an assault, their weapons raised high, ready to clash with the intruders. Witnessing this formidable display, most of the Kuru warriors

were seized by panic and fled from the lake area, their bravery crumbled by fear. Only Karna, undaunted, stood firm and confronted the enemy. Unleashing a torrent of arrows, he pierced the Gandharvas, severing their heads and littering the ground with their lifeless forms. But the Gandharvas, unyielding in their resolve, fought back with even greater valor, undeterred by the mounting casualties.

Observing the intensifying clash, Duryodhana, Shakuni, Duhshasana, Vikarna, and the rest of Dhritarashtra's sons mounted their chariots, joining the fray to drive the Gandharvas out of the lake region. The battlefield became a canvas of awe-inspiring combat, where each exchange of weapons filled onlookers with a sense of astonishment. Unable to withstand the might of the Kuru army, the Gandharvas eventually succumbed to their onslaught, forced to retreat from the sacred grounds of Dvaitavana.

As the Kuru host found themselves overwhelmed by the charging forces of the Gandharvas, Chitrangada, their fierce king, roared with fury. Unleashing a mystical onslaught, he cast illusions upon illusions, making it seem as if ten Gandharvas surrounded each Kaurava warrior. Fear and confusion seized the Kuru army, causing them to scatter and flee from the battlefield. Amidst the chaos, only Karna, Shakuni, and Duryodhana stood their ground, ready to face the relentless Gandharvas.

Karna, the mighty son of the sun god, remained steadfast on his chariot, engaging in a fierce battle with the Gandharvas. They, desperate to vanquish him, surrounded his chariot and launched a relentless assault. Charioteers and horses fell to their attacks, wheels were shattered, and his chariot was reduced to ruins. Undeterred by the destruction around him, Karna leaped down, brandishing his sword and shield. With a heavy heart, he turned and retreated from the battlefield, leaving Duryodhana to bear the shame of his abandonment.

Now, Duryodhana alone faced the relentless onslaught of the Gandharvas. They closed in on his chariot, slaying his charioteer and horses. Deprived of his chariot, Duryodhana found himself at the mercy of Chitrangada, who seized him. Duhshasana and the other sons of Dhritarashtra suffered the same fate. With their capture, those remaining in Duryodhana's army sought refuge with the Pandavas, approaching Yudhisthira with their desperate pleas. "O sons of Pritha," they implored, "the Gandharvas have captured our prince and his brothers. Please save them!"

Hearing their pleas, Bhima, with a scornful laugh, responded, "What we failed to achieve with our horses, elephants, and infantry, the Gandharvas have accomplished! The sons of Dhritarashtra came here with malicious intent, and now they face the consequences of their sinful actions. It seems there are still some who wish us well in this world."

But Yudhisthira, in his wisdom, corrected Bhima, "This is not a time for harsh words. When a helpless plea reaches a Kshatriya, how can we refuse to offer protection? Our cousins and the royal women have been dishonored. Our family's reputation is at stake. It cannot be written in history that the warriors of the Kuru dynasty were defeated. Let us arm ourselves and march against the Gandharvas."

Inspired by Yudhisthira's words, Arjuna and the sons of Madri pledged their protection, and even Bhima readied himself for battle. They mounted chariots brought from the Kuru camp and advanced towards the Gandharvas, demanding the release of Duryodhana. But the Gandharvas, unyielding, rejected their pleas, initiating a fierce conflict. The Gandharvas assailed the Pandavas' chariots with the same ferocity they had shown against Karna and Duryodhana. However, with his celestial weapons, Arjuna unleashed devastation, sending thousands of Gandharvas to meet their demise. The Gandharvas found themselves unable to breach the defense of the Pandava chariots, and as they fell under the onslaught, some sought refuge in the skies, attempting to escape capture.

Observing their retreat, Arjuna showered them with a net of arrows, preventing their escape. The Gandharvas retaliated with a barrage of their own. Chitrangada, their leader, tried to subdue Arjuna with his mystical illusions, but the celestial weapons of Arjuna shattered his deceptive veil. Undeterred, Chitrangada fought back with renewed strength. However, Arjuna, employing the power of the sabda-veda weapon, dispelled the mystical veil. As Chitrangada grew weary from the battle, he revealed his true identity to his dear friend Arjuna. Witnessing this, Arjuna withdrew his weapons, and the sons of Pandu followed suit, marking a momentary respite in the clash of titans.

Arjuna, with a smile on his face, questioned Chitrangada, "O valiant warrior, why have you captured the sons of Dhritarashtra and their wives?"

Chitrangada responded, "Knowing that you were in the forest, these sinful men arrived here with the intention to mock and humiliate you. Understanding their malicious intent, Indra has sent me to capture Duryodhana and bring him to the celestial realms for punishment. This wicked prince now stands in chains. If it pleases you, I will take him before Indra."

Arjuna replied, "O Chitrangada, if you wish to please us, release Duryodhana. This is the desire of our brother Yudhisthira."

Chitrangada then appealed to Arjuna, "This wicked soul is filled with false pride and envy. He does not deserve to be set free. If Yudhisthira knew the true reason behind their arrival here, I am certain he would allow them to face the consequences before Indra. Let us go to Yudhisthira and let him decide the fate of these sinful men."

They approached Yudhisthira and recounted the misdeeds of Duryodhana. After listening attentively, Yudhisthira ordered the release of his cousins. He expressed his gratitude to the Gandharvas for not taking the lives of Duryodhana and the other

Kurus, stating, "It is fortunate that, despite having the power, you refrained from killing Dhritarashtra's wicked son and the rest of the Kuru lineage. This act of kindness has preserved the honor of my family. I am deeply satisfied with the Gandharvas. Ask of me anything you desire, and once your wishes are fulfilled, return to your celestial abode."

Pleased with Yudhisthira's humility, the lord of the Gandharvas departed to his realm. The Pandavas witnessed the appearance of Indra over the battlefield, who showered the fallen soldiers with the nectar of immortality, reviving all the Gandharvas. They then ascended back to the heavenly realms.

Upon Duryodhana's release, he felt immense shame, and Yudhisthira reprimanded him, saying, "O child, never again mock or belittle anyone, for such acts will never bring you true happiness. Return to your kingdom. I wish you well."

With his head bowed in profound humiliation, Duryodhana offered a boon to Arjuna in gratitude for saving his life. Along with his relatives, he departed from the presence of Yudhisthira, leaving behind the resounding echoes of his remorse.

Chapter 25

Krsnas and Bhisma

As Bhishma learned that Arjuna had arrived to obtain the five arrows, his resolve only grew stronger. "Krishna has sent Arjuna for those arrows, but I vow that unless Krishna himself interferes in this battle, I will slay the Pandavas. I will compel Him to break his promise of not fighting, for I am determined to protect His beloved devotees." Hearing Bhishma's unwavering determination, Duryodhana's heart was relieved of all grief.

On the ninth day of the dreadful carnage, Bhishma, the son of Shantanu, arranged his formations in the sarvatobhadra formation. Kripa, Kritavarman, Saivya, Shakuni, Jayadratha, Sudakshina, the ruler of the Kambhojas, and the mighty Grandsire Bhishma himself positioned themselves at the forefront of the vast divisions. Drona, Bhurishrava, Salya, and Bhagadatta took their positions on the right flank of the formation, while Ashvatthama, Somadatta, the Kings of Avantipura and Bahlika held the left wing. In the center of the formation stood Duryodhana, Susharman, and the warriors from Trigarta. In the rear of the army, the formidable Rakshasa Alambhusha and Shrutayush stood ready.

King Yudhisthira, Bhimasena, and the twin sons of Madri stood resolutely at the forefront of their formidable divisions, prepared for battle. The commander-in-chief Dhristadyumna, along with Virata, Satyaki, Shikhandi, Arjuna, Ghatotkacha, and Chekitana, were encircled by their battalions of warriors. Assisting these great heroes were Abhimanyu, Drupada, the five Kaikeya

brothers, and Kuntibhoja. They all stood ready to engage in combat.

Then the Kauravas, led by the Grandsire himself, charged towards the Pandavas with an ardent desire for victory. Eager to halt Bhishma's advance, the Pandavas also rushed forward to confront him. Abhimanyu unleashed his arrows upon the Kaurava forces, causing havoc across the battlefield. He swiftly cleared the enemy lines of infantry, cavalry, and chariot fighters, tossing them about like wisps of cotton in the wind. With no one to shield them, Duryodhana's divisions were engulfed in the flames of Abhimanyu's prowess, much like dry grass devoured by a raging fire. Abhimanyu defeated Kripa, Drona, Ashvatthama, and Jayadratha, sending them reeling backwards from the frontline. His bow remained continuously drawn in a circular motion, resembling a radiant halo around the sun. Warriors from both sides acclaimed his valor as he traversed the battlefield, bringing delight to Yudhisthira's heart. Abhimanyu routed the Kaurava army from one end of the battlefield to the other, evoking a great lamentation from Duryodhana's troops. It was as if a second Arjuna had emerged, showering them with arrows of death.

Observing the rout of his troops, Duryodhana commanded Alambhusha, saying, "This son of Arjuna possesses his father's might. I see no other warrior who can defeat him, except one who possesses mystic powers. Kill this son of Subhadra and secure victory for my forces." Bowing to Duryodhana's order, the valiant and formidable Rakshasa, Alambhusha, swiftly advanced to confront Abhimanyu. Approaching Abhimanyu's division, Alambhusha began slaughtering his soldiers by the hundreds and thousands. He fought ferociously, appearing to dance on the platform of his chariot. The mighty Rakshasa set his sights on the five sons of Draupadi, relentlessly attacking them with his arrows. Yudhisthira's son, Prativindya, pierced Alambhusha's armor, causing the Rakshasa to roar in pain. Enraged by this, Alambhusha slew the horses of Prativindya and his four brothers. He then showered them with countless arrows,

leaving them bereft of their chariots and closing in to deliver the final blow.

In the midst of the fierce battle, Abhimanyu rushed forward with lightning speed to aid his half-brothers, who were in dire straits against the formidable Rakshasa, Alambhusha. The clash between the son of Arjuna and the mighty Rakshasa was a spectacle that left all onlookers in awe. Abhimanyu pierced Alambhusha with five arrows, but the Rakshasa swiftly retaliated, lodging nine arrows deep into the chest of Arjuna's son. Undeterred, Alambhusha unleashed blood-sucking arrows that pierced Abhimanyu's body and vanished into the earth. Infuriated, the valiant son of Arjuna released a barrage of a hundred arrows, forcing the Rakshasa to turn his back on the battlefield.

Alambhusha, resorting to his mystical powers, shrouded the entire battlefield in a dense darkness, rendering all vision futile. Abhimanyu's supporting troops were seized by fear, their hearts gripped with dread. To counter this enchantment, Subhadra's son unleashed a solar weapon that bathed the battlefield in brilliant light, banishing the darkness. Abhimanyu then rained down numerous broad-headed arrows upon Alambhusha, disregarding the Rakshasa's subsequent attempts at mystic illusions, all of which were shattered by the unwavering prowess of Arjuna's valiant son. Abhimanyu ultimately pierced the Rakshasa's body, causing him to resemble a towering mountain drenched in blood. With his wounds gushing crimson and devoid of any remaining mystic weapons, Alambhusha abandoned his chariot and fled the battlefield.

Witnessing the rout of his troops, Bhishma, the mighty patriarch, launched a fierce attack against Abhimanyu. The Kaurava chariot fighters encircled Arjuna's son and unleashed a relentless storm of arrows upon him. Undeterred by the overwhelming odds, Abhimanyu valiantly fought back. Coming to his aid was

his father, Arjuna, who swiftly arrived at the scene where Abhimanyu was wreaking havoc upon the enemy forces. However, Sardwat's son, Kripa, unleashed twenty-five arrows that pierced Arjuna's body. Enraged by this act, Satyaki aimed an arrow capable of taking Kripa's life, only to have it intercepted by Ashvatthama, the son of Drona, who then struck Satyaki's chest with multiple broad-headed shafts. In retaliation, Satyaki retaliated, piercing Ashvatthama with six arrows that caused him to lose consciousness on his chariot.

Witnessing this exchange, Drona charged forth to face Satyaki. Arjuna, determined to aid Satyaki, unleashed three iron-headed arrows that found their mark in Drona's body. The formidable Drona retaliated, showering the third son of Pandu with a deluge of arrows. Observing the intense battle between these two indomitable warriors, Duryodhana commanded Susharman to join the fray and attack Arjuna. Supported by his military divisions, Susharman eagerly engaged Arjuna in combat. The arrows of the Trigarta King pierced Arjuna's body like birds finding refuge in a tree. Enraged by this assault, Arjuna invoked the Vayavya weapon, conjuring a hurricane that swept across the battlefield, uprooting men, horses, elephants, and chariots, scattering them in all directions. In response, Drona unleashed the Mahadeva weapon, causing the tempest to subside. Faced with the destructive might of this weapon, the soldiers of the Trigarta army, fearing for their lives, fled from the battlefield.

Duryodhana, unwilling to yield, ordered the renowned chariot fighters Kripa, Ashvatthama, Salya, Sudakshina, Bahlika, and the Avanti brothers to engage Bhimasena in combat. They advanced upon him with their formidable elephant divisions, seeking to harass him. However, the fierce Bhima, licking his lips with anticipation, gripped his death-dealing mace and descended from his chariot, launching a relentless onslaught upon the massive beasts and their riders. Bhima's body seemed impenetrable, with arrows barely able to pierce his skin. Fearlessly, he danced upon the battlefield, striking down the huge elephant divisions with his powerful mace. The elephants,

as they fell under his relentless assault, emitted anguished wails. Some had their heads smashed, while others had their backs broken by the sheer force of Bhima's mighty blows. Covered in the blood of the fallen elephants and soldiers, his body pierced by countless arrows, Bhima appeared as if Yamaraja himself had descended to claim the lives of all beings. Those elephants that remained alive fled in terror, and once again, Duryodhana's troops were defeated in battle.

At the peak of midday, an intense clash unfolded between the formidable Grandsire Bhishma and the valiant warriors of the Somaka clan. Like a raging inferno, the renowned Kaurava warrior decimated the enemy ranks, devouring them by the thousands. Drupada, Virata, Dhristadyumna, and Shikhandi stepped forward, their arrows raining upon Bhishma, seeking to pierce every inch of his being. Yet, the indomitable Grandsire remained untouched by their onslaught. Unleashing his own deadly volley, he retaliated with devastating force, striking Drupada, Virata, and Dhristadyumna in the same manner they had pierced him. However, against Shikhandi, who had once been born female, Bhishma refused to unleash a single weapon, bound by his code of honor.

Fury ignited within Bhishma, and he unleashed his wrath upon the Pandava ranks. With his lethal shafts, he laid waste to elephants, chariot warriors, and horsemen. The sound of his bow reverberated through the air, striking fear into the hearts of the Pandava troops. His arrows pierced not only their armor but also their very souls, passing through them and embedding themselves into the earth. Before him, the Grandsire forged a macabre tableau of death—a cemetery adorned with lifeless bodies, shattered chariots, fallen horses, and deceased elephants. With broad-headed arrows, he shattered chariots, reducing them to mere fragments of axles and wheels. Severed heads and countless weapons littered the ground, testament to the havoc

wrought by the Grandsire. His arrows blazed across the Kurukshetra plain, akin to meteors scorching the heavens.

The Pandavas, despite their valiant efforts, found themselves unable to rally their forces, paralyzed by the sheer might of Bhishma. The Grandsire possessed the vigor of youth, and when he encountered Arjuna, he set upon him, showering him with a storm of blazing arrows.

Observing the rout of the Pandava army at the hands of Bhishma, Lord Krishna addressed Arjuna, his voice carrying the weight of urgency, "The hour you have longed for has arrived. It is now time for you to slay Bhishma, or else he shall slay you. In the assembly of kings at Virata's court, you pledged to vanquish this mighty warrior. Fulfill your words now."

Arjuna replied, his determination resolute, "What is preferable—another twelve years in the forest or sovereignty tainted by impending doom? Which of these destinies should I embrace? Urge the horses onward, O Hrishikesha, for I shall fulfill your desires. I shall bring down the formidable Grandsire, the invincible warrior."

Thus, Lord Krishna steered the chariot toward the battlefield where Bhishma fought. The Pandava army rallied behind Arjuna, ready to confront the Grandsire with unwavering resolve. Witnessing Partha's advance, Bhishma roared like a lion, enveloping Dhananjaya's chariot in a relentless deluge of arrows. But Partha shattered Bhishma's bow, reducing it to fragments. As Bhishma reached for another bow, Arjuna swiftly rendered it useless, leaving Shantanu's son in awe, exclaiming, "Well done! Well done!" Bhishma, undeterred, grasped yet another bow and unleashed its fury upon Arjuna's body. In response, Arjuna released a multitude of arrows, piercing his grandfather's flesh and drawing forth his blood. Bhishma intensified his onslaught, his prowess reaching unparalleled heights, decimating thousands of Arjuna's supporting troops before his very eyes. The Grandsire ensnared Arjuna's chariot in a barrage of arrows,

obscuring Arjuna and Krishna from view. With a single arrow, he felled five warriors riding atop an elephant, and with another, he brought down the colossal beast itself. Bhishma appeared as the harbinger of destruction, an embodiment of fiery devastation. The entire Pandava army, gripped by terror, began to flee the battlefield.

It became evident that Arjuna was not fighting at his full potential, while Bhishma stood poised to claim victory. The sky filled with arrows, and Arjuna found himself perilously immersed in danger. Witnessing this dire situation, Lord Krishna could no longer tolerate the prospect of Arjuna's defeat.

Among the heroes, only the steadfast Dhristadyumna remained undaunted, ready to continue the fight. Krishna turned to him and declared, "Inform the Pandava host that they may now return home. The war is concluded, for I shall personally slay Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Duryodhana, and the entire Kuru army."

Breaking His own vow not to engage in combat, the Supreme Personality, Sri Krishna, descended from the chariot, seizing the wheel of a shattered chariot. With resolute determination, He advanced upon Bhishma, His hair and yellow garments flowing in the wind. Bhishma, who had sworn to kill Arjuna, compelled the Supreme Lord to take up arms in order to protect His devotee. Such was the vow of Bhishma. Roaring like a lion, the Lord of the universe, the mighty Krishna, assailed Bhishma. His divine presence resembled a tempestuous raincloud, accompanied by flashes of lightning. Beholding the lotus-eyed Lord rushing towards him, Bhishma unleashed arrows that pierced Krishna's celestial form. The Supreme Godhead, whose very essence transcended the material realm, welcomed those arrows with the affection of a lover receiving the gentle bites of his beloved. Bhishma addressed the Supreme Lord, saying, "Come, come, O lotus-eyed one. I offer my respectful obeisances to You, O God of gods. O my Lord, vanquish me in

this battle, that I may attain great fame. O Govinda, strike me as You please, for I am eternally Your servant, life after life."

Descending from his chariot, Arjuna hastened to intercept Lord Krishna, seizing Him with great effort. In a desperate attempt to halt Him, Arjuna pleaded, "O mighty-armed Keshava, do not break the promise you made in the assembly of kings. You declared, 'I shall not fight.' Alas, the burden of this great task now rests upon me. I swear that I shall slay the Grandsire. I swear by my weapons, by truth, and by my righteous deeds. You shall witness this mighty warrior falling before me with the utmost ease." Lord Krishna did not respond to Arjuna's words but cast aside the wheel of the chariot in a fit of tremendous anger, as the golden sun dipped below the western horizon.

Chapter 26

Night of the 9th day

As the Pandavas stood before the illustrious Grandsire, Bhishma, they felt the weight of his formidable presence. Yudhisthira, the righteous king, stepped forward and addressed Bhishma with respect and humility. "O Bhishma, the world marvels at your prowess, and we have witnessed the devastation you have wrought upon our armies. We stand here today, seeking your guidance and counsel. Tell us, noble warrior, how can we overcome this seemingly invincible force that you embody? We are beset with sorrow and fear, and our hearts yearn for a path to victory."

A smile played upon Bhishma's weathered face as he listened to Yudhisthira's words. His voice, deep and resonant, carried the weight of wisdom and experience. "Welcome, O sons of Pandu, and the mighty Arjuna, my beloved grandnephew. It is an honor to receive you in my humble abode. Speak your desires, and I shall strive to fulfill them to the best of my abilities."

Yudhisthira, his gaze steady and resolute, responded, "O Bhishma, you have been our protector and guide, a father to us

when we were in need. Your affection and care for us are immeasurable. But now, fate has placed us on opposing sides of this great conflict. We beseech you, share your knowledge and reveal to us the means by which we can overcome you in battle. We do not wish to see you harmed, but our duty compels us to secure victory."

Bhishma's eyes gleamed with admiration for Yudhisthira's unwavering sense of duty. He spoke with a blend of affection and gravity, "O Yudhisthira, your words touch my heart, for they are filled with respect and love. I have nurtured you all as my own, and it pains me to see you embroiled in this strife. But know this, my dear ones, in this battle, I stand committed to the Kaurava cause. My loyalty lies with them, bound by my oaths and duty. Yet, I shall not withhold my counsel from you, as my affection for you transcends the bounds of this battlefield."

Arjuna, the great warrior with eyes like fiery embers, stepped forward, his voice resonating with determination. "O Grandsire, I bow to you, for you are my elder and my teacher. But I have made a solemn vow to vanquish you in battle, and I cannot rest until I fulfill that pledge. Your prowess is unmatched, and the thought of raising my bow against you fills me with both trepidation and resolve. Yet, I implore you, share with me any weaknesses or vulnerabilities that I may exploit to secure victory."

Bhishma's gaze shifted to Arjuna, and his voice resonated with a mixture of fondness and admiration. "Arjuna, my dear one, I have watched you grow from a tender child into a fearsome warrior. Your skill with the bow is unrivaled, and your valor is known throughout the lands. It gladdens my heart to see such determination in your eyes. But know this, my dear nephew, victory over me will not come easily. I am armed with divine boons and the accumulated knowledge of a lifetime. However, I shall reveal one vulnerability to you—a vulnerability born out of my own vows and principles. It is for you to decide how to exploit it."

The Pandavas listened intently, their eyes fixed upon Bhishma, eager to receive his counsel. The Grandsire continued, "I have taken a vow never to raise my weapons against a woman or an unarmed foe. This vow has bound me, and it is the key to my downfall. Seek a way to exploit this vulnerability, and victory shall be within your grasp. But remember, my dear ones, victory comes at a price. Choose your path wisely."

The Pandavas, their hearts filled with gratitude, bowed before Bhishma, acknowledging his wisdom and guidance. They departed from his presence, their minds aflame with new strategies and newfound hope. Lord Krishna, the divine charioteer, accompanied them, his presence a beacon of reassurance in the face of their greatest challenge yet.

Chapter 27

10th day of battle

The Kauravas, placing Bhishma in their forefront, prepared for battle. Behind Bhishma stood Dhritarastra's sons, supported by a

formidable array of warriors including Drona, Ashvatthama, Bhagadatta, Kripa, Kritavarman, the mighty Sudakshina, the King of the Kambhojas, Jayatsena, the ruler of Magadha, Shakuni, and Brihadvala. The sheer magnitude of their forces was awe-inspiring, with countless soldiers ready to unleash their fury upon the enemy.

As the two armies clashed, the cacophony of clashing weapons and armor filled the air. Shikhandi, driven by his resolve, launched a relentless assault on the grandsire, his arrows finding their mark and piercing Bhishma's chest. Yet, Bhishma remained steadfast, refusing to retaliate against Shikhandi. Instead, he turned his attention to Shikhandi's supporting troops, unleashing devastation upon them like a raging inferno devouring a forest. Bhishma's refusal to engage with Shikhandi stemmed from the deep-rooted belief that Shikhandi, born a woman, had transformed his gender, and as such, Bhishma could not raise his weapon against him.

Undeterred, Shikhandi defiantly replied, "I am well aware of your might, capable of annihilating the entire Kshatriya race, and even subduing the formidable Parashurama. Yet, I shall confront you and bring about your demise. Whether you choose to fight me or not, you shall not escape with your life. Prepare yourself, Bhishma, for the journey to the next realm."

Unmoved by Shikhandi's words, Bhishma continued his relentless onslaught, routing the armies of the Somakas and the Shrinjayas. With every ounce of his strength, he felled tens of thousands of elephants and horsemen. On this fateful day, the Grandsire claimed the lives of two hundred thousand foot soldiers. Yet, the Pandavas remained resolute, undeterred by the havoc Bhishma wreaked upon their ranks. They advanced with weapons raised, determined to bring Bhishma down.

Witnessing Bhishma's unrivaled prowess, Arjuna commanded Shikhandi, "Engage Bhishma in battle! Fear not for your life, for destiny has decreed his downfall." Following Arjuna's directive,

Shikhandi, accompanied by Dhristadyumna and Abhimanyu, charged towards the Grandsire, unleashing their formidable arsenal of weapons.

Meanwhile, Drona, locked in combat with the Pandava warriors, began to discern ominous signs portending the impending doom of the Kauravas. Addressing his son, Drona spoke with a heavy heart, "Today, my son, the mighty Partha will exert every effort to conquer the Grandsire. I sense a strange reluctance in my arrows, as if they hesitate to leave their quiver. My bow seems to yawn, and my strength wanes. My weapons no longer respond to my call. Frightful cries emanate from animals and birds alike. My spirit is dampened, and the sun's brilliance has dimmed. The four corners of the battlefield are ablaze, and vultures circle overhead. The Kaurava warriors, adorned with golden ornaments, appear pale and lifeless. The resounding echoes of the Panchajanya and the twang of the Gandiva fill the air. Without a doubt, Arjuna seeks only to confront the Grandsire, leaving the other mighty warriors aside. He aims to slay Bhishma by placing Shikhandi in his path. Alas, what awaits us in the days to come?" With these foreboding thoughts, Drona recommenced his battle against the Pandava warriors, their fate hanging precariously in the balance.

On this fateful day, Bhishma unleashed a merciless slaughter upon the Somakas and the Shrinjayas. Arjuna, too, wreaked havoc, cutting down hundreds and thousands of chariot fighters, horsemen, and foot soldiers. The battlefield was drenched in blood, with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. Bhishma's onslaught scorched the Pandava forces, but after ten days of relentless carnage, he relinquished any desire to preserve his own life. Longing for his own demise, he ruminated, "I shall no longer partake in the merciless act of slaughtering vast legions of warriors."

Spotting Yudhisthira nearby, Bhishma offered his counsel, "O Yudhisthira, heed my words and fulfill my request. I have spent countless days bringing down hordes of soldiers. O Bharata, I no longer harbor the will to protect this mortal frame. If you wish to grant my wish, then slay me as I stand upon my chariot. Place Shikhandi and Partha at the forefront of your army and facilitate my ascent to the celestial realms."

Comprehending Bhishma's intentions, Yudhisthira commanded the Shrinjaya army, led by Dhristadyumna, to launch an attack on Bhishma. Arjuna, in sync with Shikhandi, unleashed a barrage of lethal arrows upon the grandsire. In a short span of time, the Grandsire claimed the lives of fourteen thousand chariot fighters. Shikhandi, in turn, released fourteen broad-headed arrows that found their mark in Bhishma's chest. Yet, the son of Ganga glared at Shikhandi with seething rage.

Arjuna commanded Shikhandi, "Charge forth and slay the grandsire! Waste no time. Confront him without delay!" Obeying Arjuna's orders, the son of Drupada unleashed his deadly weaponry, intent on bringing down the foremost warrior of the Kuru lineage.

Duryodhana, observing the imminent danger to his Grandsire, rushed forward to protect him. He ordered all the mighty warriors and their legions to eliminate Arjuna. Witnessing their advance, Arjuna invoked his celestial arsenal, unleashing a devastating carnage. His celestial weapons sent forth hundreds of thousands of arrows, severing heads, arms, and legs of the oncoming enemy. Incensed by the prowess of his grandson, Bhishma invoked a celestial weapon and charged at Arjuna in full view of the assembled archers. Yet, upon beholding Shikhandi leading the charge, the grandsire reluctantly withdrew the blazing weapon.

Bhishma focused his attention on annihilating the Somakas and the Shrinjayas. With unmatched ferocity, he slaughtered ten thousand elephants and brought down seven mighty charioteers

from the Panchalas and the Matsyas. Ten thousand horsemen and five thousand foot soldiers met their grim fate and were sent to the realm of Yamaraja. Thinning the ranks of the Pandava army, Bhishma proceeded to dispatch Satanika, Virata's brother, to the afterlife. Anyone who followed in Arjuna's wake was swiftly consigned to the realm beyond by Bhishma's relentless onslaught. The tenth day of the Kurukshetra war witnessed Bhishma accomplishing awe-inspiring feats. None could stand before the Grandsire as he unleashed his deadly arsenal. King Drupada, Dhristadyumna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Virata, Abhimanyu, Satyaki, the sons of Draupadi, Ghatotkacha, Bhima, and Kuntibhoja found themselves drowning in the ocean of Bhishma's might. But salvation arrived in the form of Arjuna, who came to their rescue. Encouraging them with his words, Arjuna vanquished Bhishma's support troops. The great charioteers and mighty warriors of the Pandava army joined forces and launched a relentless assault on Bhishma, determined to end his life. With Shikhandi leading the charge, they pierced Bhishma with a barrage of arrows. Arjuna managed to sever Bhishma's bow, provoking the wrath of the Kauravas. They unleashed their celestial weapons upon Arjuna, showering him with thousands of arrows. Shikhandi persistently targeted Bhishma, but the Grandsire remained unperturbed, pushing through the enemy ranks. Arjuna engaged Ganga's son, shattering his bow with his own arrows. Bhishma grasped another weapon, only to have it meet the same fate. Arjuna continued his assault, rendering all the bows taken up by Bhishma useless. Consumed by fury, Bhishma hurled a mighty dart at Arjuna, yet the valiant warrior effortlessly tore it apart. Observing his weapon rendered futile, Bhishma contemplated, "If it were not for Lord Vishnu protecting the Pandavas, I could decimate them with a single bow. But two reasons prevent me from engaging them: their protection by Lord Krishna and the presence of Shikhandi. I cannot be slain on this battlefield. Such was the benediction bestowed upon me by my father, Shantanu. He ordained that I would meet my end only when I desired it. And now, I believe that time has arrived." As he ruminated thus,

celestial beings and sages confirmed his meditation, proclaiming, "O King, your departure from this mortal realm is imminent. Withdraw your heart from this battle." With their words, a fragrant and auspicious breeze, carrying moisture, swept across all directions. In the heavens, Bhishma heard the resounding echoes of conch shells, drums, and bugles. Showers of flowers cascaded from the skies, descending upon Bhishma alone. All this he perceived, and his thoughts turned to attaining the kingdom of God. Meanwhile, the valiant warriors intensified their assault upon Bhishma, displaying even greater audacity. Arjuna struck every part of Bhishma's body with his arrows, yet the son of Ganga stood resolute, returning fire and afflicting the enemy ranks once again. Shikhandi and Arjuna maneuvered their chariots closer to the Grandsire. Arjuna, with his blade, severed Bhishma's bow and tore his banner from the chariot. Shantanu's son retrieved another bow, only to have it shattered as well. Arjuna repeatedly sliced through all of Bhishma's bows, causing the venerable warrior to lose all desire to continue the fight. Arjuna unleashed a barrage of hundreds of arrows, piercing the Grandsire as he stood upon his chariot. Spotting Duhshasana nearby, Bhishma remarked, "Behold, the mighty archer Arjuna pierces me with a thousand arrows. I am impervious to the combined might of celestial gods and demons, let alone ordinary warriors of this world. These arrows that pierce my body do not belong to Shikhandi but to Arjuna himself. Only he can inflict upon me the agony I presently endure. These arrows are imbued with the potency of thunderbolts, akin to venomous poison that seeps deep into my being. Beyond the wielder of the mighty Gandiva bow, there exists no one capable of inflicting upon me such excruciating torment."

SWith determination, Bhishma hurled a dart at Arjuna, only to witness Partha slice it to pieces in mid-air. Undeterred, Shantanu's son reached for a sword and shield, intending to engage Arjuna in close combat. But before the Grandsire could

descend from his chariot, the son of Kunti shattered the sword and shield with astonishing skill, leaving the onlookers in awe of this remarkable feat on the battlefield.

In response, King Yudhisthira rallied his forces, commanding them to assail Ganga's son without fear. The Pandava army surged forward, brandishing their raised weapons. Arjuna, releasing a relentless barrage of hundreds of arrows, pierced Bhishma in every inch of his body, leaving no space untouched by the deadly projectiles. Mangled and wounded, the aged patriarch of the Kuru dynasty tumbled from his chariot to the ground. The Kaurava divisions echoed with sorrowful cries, their hearts sinking alongside the fallen Grandsire. His descent was akin to that of a fallen celestial god, eliciting profound lamentation.

As Bhishma lay fallen, his head turned toward the east, he recognized the inauspicious course of the sun and refused to let his soul depart from his mortal frame. Despite being pierced by countless arrows, he did not make contact with the ground. In that moment, Bhishma appeared divine, surrounded by a cool shower from the pouring clouds, and the earth itself trembled in response. Witnessing her son's fall from the chariot, Ganga dispatched rishis in the form of graceful swans. Circumambulating the fallen warrior, they beseeched him not to relinquish his body until the sun had entered its northern course.

Addressing the rishis, Bhishma declared, "I shall not depart from this world while the sun lingers in its southern trajectory. My departure shall coincide with the sun's transition to its northern path." The celestial swans returned to the heavens and conveyed Bhishma's decision to Ganga, his mother.

Chapter 28

Bhishma speaks

After the great Grandsire of the Kuru dynasty, Bhishma, had fallen from his chariot, both the Pandava and Kaurava armies ceased fighting. Roaring like bulls, the Pandavas and their allies, the Shrinjayas, expressed their grief, while the Kauravas, including Duryodhana and Kripa, sighed and wept in anguish. Duhshasana hurried to inform Drona, who was engaged in battle elsewhere, about Bhishma's fall. Upon hearing the dreadful news, Drona momentarily lost consciousness and fell from his chariot. When he regained his senses, he commanded his troops not to engage in combat with the Pandavas. Disregarding their armor, both the Pandavas and the Kurus gathered by Bhishma's side, offering their obeisances to the Grandsire with joined palms.

Bhishma's head, though untouched by arrows, hung down, and he requested the warriors present to bring him a suitable pillow. They quickly fetched pillows made of the finest silk, but Bhishma rejected them, stating that they were not fit for a hero. He then turned to Arjuna and asked him to provide a pillow that he deemed appropriate. Tearfully stringing his bow, Arjuna filled the ground beneath Bhishma's head with numerous arrows. Resting his head upon that warrior's pillow, Bhishma expressed his gratitude, saying that Arjuna had given him a pillow and bed befitting a true Kshatriya. He remarked that this was the way a

warrior should sleep on the battlefield and declared his intention to rest on that bed until the sun changed its course to the north.

Duryodhana, hoping to save Bhishma's life, brought many physicians to heal his wounds, but Bhishma dismissed them all, desiring only death. With utmost respect, both the Pandavas and the Kauravas paid their final respects to the eldest member of the Kuru family. Guards were stationed to protect him from Rakshasas and predatory animals, and after circumambulating him, the warriors returned to their tents.

As the night passed, the Pandavas and the Kauravas gathered once again at Bhishma's resting place. Many people from Hastinapura had come to bid farewell to the dying Bhishma, showering his body with flowers and sandalwood powder, while others blew trumpets and conch shells.

When the Pandavas and the Kauravas surrounded Bhishma, the son of Ganga requested some water. The kings promptly brought numerous pitchers of water to quench his thirst, but Bhishma refused them all and called for Arjuna. He said, "My body, covered with arrows, burns, and my mouth is dry. You, O Dhananjaya, are an eminent archer and can give me water in a manner befitting a warrior." Understanding his grandfather's intention, Arjuna picked up his mighty Gandiva bow and placed the parjanya weapon on it. He then pierced the earth, causing a stream of water to gush forth, satisfying his grandfather's thirst. Bhishma, addressing Arjuna once more, spoke affectionately, acknowledging that with Lord Krishna as his ally, there was nothing in the world that he couldn't achieve. Narada had informed him that Arjuna was none other than the ancient sage Nara, and Krishna was Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Bhishma praised Arjuna as the greatest archer on earth, unparalleled among men. He revealed his unsuccessful attempts to convince Duryodhana of Arjuna's prowess, predicting that Duryodhana would be defeated by Bhima's mace on the Kurukshetra battlefield.

Upon hearing these prophetic words, Duryodhana's heart sank. Bhishma advised him to abandon his anger and spoke highly of Arjuna's celestial weaponry. He urged Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas as long as Krishna's wrath had not yet fallen upon his army. Bhishma's wise counsel aimed at Duryodhana's welfare, but the wicked-hearted prince refused to accept it, akin to a dying man rejecting medicine.

After the Pandavas and the Kauravas returned to their tents, Karna approached Bhishma in his mortal state. With tears in his eyes and a faltering voice, he introduced himself as Radha's son, the one whom Bhishma had always looked upon with anger.

Hearing Karna's voice, Bhishma opened his eyes and, seeing no one around, embraced Karna with one arm, displaying great affection. He affectionately stated that if Karna had not humbly approached him, things would not have gone well for him. Bhishma revealed that he had heard from Narada and Vyasa that Karna was Kunti's son and not Radha's. He acknowledged that he bore no hatred toward Karna and had only spoken harshly to cool his envy of the Pandavas.

Karna admitted that he was Kunti's son but had been raised by a charioteer. He confessed that he had enjoyed Duryodhana's wealth with his relatives for a long time and could not go back on it now. Despite knowing that Arjuna and Krishna were invincible in battle, Karna considered it his duty to try and kill Arjuna for the sake of his friend Duryodhana. He sought forgiveness for any offense he might have committed due to his foolishness.

Bhishma assured Karna that he held no anger toward him and granted him permission to fight. He predicted that through Arjuna, Karna would attain heavenly realms. Bhishma had attempted to make peace, but his efforts had failed. He wished Karna good fortune and advised him to go and fight. Having spoken these words, the Grandsire fell silent. Karna paid his

respects to Bhishma and circumambulated him before proceeding to Duryodhana's tent.

Chapter 29

The Eleventh Day of Rivalry; Dronacharya Becomes Commander

Dhritarastra, with an air of anticipation, questioned his charioteer, Sanjaya, about the actions of his sons after the renowned Bhishma had fallen. He acknowledged Bhishma's unparalleled prowess on the front lines and wondered whom his son had chosen to lead their famed divisions.

Sanjaya, ever the faithful advisor, responded to the king's query with a voice resonating with the weight of impending battles. He recounted how Duryodhana, upon witnessing the lamentation for Bhishma's fall, sought the counsel of his loyal friend and ally, Karna. Duryodhana expressed his concerns over the leadership vacuum left by Bhishma's departure and asked Karna for his recommendation.

Karna, a man of valor and wisdom, replied to Duryodhana with careful consideration. He acknowledged the qualifications of all the maharathis, each proficient in weaponry and skilled in marshaling large armies. However, he advised that choosing one among them would cause discontent among the others. Instead, Karna proposed that Dronacharya, the revered preceptor, be bestowed with the honor of leading the forces. He emphasized Dronacharya's seniority, noble birth, superior knowledge, and prowess on the battlefield. Karna deemed him worthy of worship and respect, urging Duryodhana to bestow the command upon him.

Embracing Karna's advice, Duryodhana approached Dronacharya, who stood amidst the troops, radiating an aura of authority and experience. Paying homage to his preceptor, Duryodhana humbly beseeched him, recognizing his seniority, superior learning, and intelligence. He highlighted Dronacharya's ascetic penances and his profound understanding of the eternal Brahman. Duryodhana placed his trust in Dronacharya's formidable skills and requested him to take command of the eleven akshauhini divisions, leading them fearlessly in the vanguard of the army.

Dronacharya, a man of profound knowledge and martial expertise, acknowledged his qualifications in the six branches of Veda and his understanding of the science of Varnashrama. He possessed divine astras and knew the art of organizing vast armies. Recognizing Duryodhana's fervor for victory, he pledged to display all his virtues on the battlefield. However, he expressed his inability to harm the Pandavas or Dhristadyumna, who was destined to slay him.

Accepting the responsibility of leadership, Dronacharya prepared for the impending battle, arranging the divisions in the formation of a cart called Sakata. On the other side, the Pandavas formed their army in the shape of a crane known as Kraunca. Before the clash of armies, Duryodhana approached Dronacharya once more, seeking a boon. He requested that

Yudhisthira, the Pandava king, be captured alive and delivered to him.

Dronacharya, perceiving the dark intentions behind Duryodhana's request, questioned his son's desire to keep Yudhisthira alive. Dronacharya admired Yudhisthira's virtue and referred to him as Ajatashatru, the one against whom no ill-will is harbored. Duryodhana cunningly responded, stating that Yudhisthira's death alone would not ensure his victory, for the formidable Arjuna would decimate his entire army. Duryodhana desired to defeat Yudhisthira once more at dice and banish him to the forest for another thirteen years.

Understanding the treachery lurking within Duryodhana's heart, Dronacharya agreed to the plan, believing that if Arjuna could be separated from Yudhisthira, capturing the king would be possible. However, Yudhisthira, through his spies, learned of the plot and gathered his brothers and the supporting kings. In their presence, he sought the protection of Arjuna, beseeching him to remain by his side and shield him from any harm.

Arjuna, resolute and devoted to his duty, assured Yudhisthira of his unwavering commitment. He vowed never to allow Dronacharya to capture the king, comparing the certainty of his protection to the constancy of celestial bodies. Arjuna declared that as long as he drew breath, Yudhisthira had nothing to fear, for he had never spoken an untruth or made a vow he could not uphold.

With Arjuna's pledge resonating in their hearts, the armies were poised for combat. As the Kaurava host launched its assault on the Pandava forces, the battlefield transformed into a sea of carnage. The indomitable Dronacharya unleashed a relentless storm of arrows that thundered like bolts of lightning. Yet, Yudhisthira, fortified by his vast army of skilled warriors, stepped forward to confront the preceptor, mounted on his golden chariot, drawn by fiery red steeds.

Chapter 30

Abhimanyu shows his skills once more

While this clash unfolded, Shakuni, the deceitful gambler, launched an assault on Sahadeva. His arrows struck Sahadeva's chariot, piercing through the very fabric of his defense. But Sahadeva, unyielding and undeterred, retaliated swiftly. With a swift stroke, he severed Shakuni's bow, brought down his standard, and dispatched his charioteer to the realm of death. Sixty arrows found their mark on the Gandhara King, leaving him gasping for breath. Shakuni, his ego wounded, leaped from his chariot, clutching a mace, ready to face Sahadeva. The son

of Suvala met Sahadeva's challenge head-on, wielding his own mace, as the two warriors clashed in a battle fueled by animosity.

In another corner of the battlefield, King Paurava descended upon Abhimanyu, unleashing a relentless barrage of arrows that enveloped him like a curtain of death. But Abhimanyu, a true scion of Arjuna, refused to bow down before his adversary. He retaliated with precision, piercing Paurava's flesh with seven shafts, bringing down his banner, and leaving his charioteer wounded by three arrows. With vengeance burning in his eyes, Abhimanyu nocked an arrow capable of sealing Paurava's fate. Yet, fate had other plans. Kritavarman, ever loyal to the Kaurava cause, shattered Abhimanyu's bow and severed his arrow. Unfazed by this setback, Abhimanyu discarded the broken remnants and armed himself with a sword and shield. Descending from his chariot, he charged at Paurava, his resolve unshaken. Swinging his sword and shield with deadly precision, he leaped onto Paurava's chariot, striking him unconscious. Seizing Paurava by his hair, Abhimanyu prepared to deliver the final blow. However, in a desperate bid to save their comrade, Jayadratha leaped from his chariot, brandishing his sword and shield, issuing a direct challenge to Arjuna's valiant son. With the prospect of a greater battle looming, Abhimanyu relented, leaving Paurava and engaging Jayadratha instead. The battlefield erupted in chaos as numerous warriors unleashed a barrage of lances, arrows, and scimitars, hoping to overwhelm Subhadra's son. Yet, with deft swordplay, Abhimanyu sliced through their weapons, reducing them to worthless shards. A fierce and awe-inspiring clash ensued between Jayadratha and Arjuna's son, both warriors weaving intricate patterns of attack and defense. They circled each other, seeking the moment of vulnerability that would grant them victory. When Jayadratha's sword struck Abhimanyu's shield, shattering it, the tide seemed to turn. Deprived of his weapon, the Sindhu King fled from the battlefield, seeking refuge in the safety of his chariot. Abhimanyu, seizing the opportunity, unleashed a devastating assault upon the Kaurava divisions, scorching their ranks with the fire of his wrath.

Witnessing Jayadratha's defeat, Salya, undeterred, grasped a deadly dart, imbuing it with all his might, and hurled it towards Abhimanyu. But the son of Arjuna, displaying his remarkable reflexes, intercepted the weapon mid-air. With a swift counterattack, Abhimanyu sent the dart back to its origin, striking down Salya's charioteer and leaving Salya sprawled on the chariot floor. The Pandavas erupted in exultation, their voices echoing across the battlefield, praising Abhimanyu's feat.

Emboldened by his triumph, Abhimanyu confronted Salya directly, ready to face him in single combat. However, Bhima, the mighty warrior, intervened, urging Abhimanyu to step aside and let him take up the challenge. The two titans of the battlefield, each wielding a mace akin to bolts of lightning, engaged in a fierce clash. The iron weapons possessed the power to crush countless warriors with each swing. Their animosity fueled their blows as they struck each other with unrelenting fury. Despite the tremendous impact of their exchanges, neither warrior showed signs of yielding. With a final surge of determination, both Bhima and Salya launched simultaneous strikes, their maces crashing into each other with a thunderous cacophony. The force of the collision left both combatants reeling, but the blow from Bhima's mace proved overpowering, rendering Salya senseless, sprawled upon the blood-soaked earth. Bhima, too, bore the brunt of Salya's retaliation, yet he rose once again, ready to continue the fight. Faced with the loss of their formidable ally, the Kaurava forces recoiled in fear, their ranks crumbling under the weight of uncertainty.

Amidst the chaos of the battlefield, a lone figure emerged, steadfast in his defense of the Kaurava army. Vrishasena, the valiant son of Karna, unleashed a deluge of arrows, striking down Pandava chariot fighters and horsemen with deadly precision. Yet, Satanika, the son of Nakula, dared to confront him, piercing Vrishasena with ten arrows. Undeterred, the son of

Karna swiftly severed Satanika's royal banner and bow. Sensing the imminent danger, the other sons of Draupadi rallied to challenge Vrishasena, their combined assault raining down upon him. But Ashvatthama, ever loyal and swift, rushed to his defense, halting the onslaught from Draupadi's sons. The Pandavas, driven by the need to protect their own, surged forward to engage Ashvatthama in battle. The clash of both armies was a sight to behold, a magnificent display of skill and valor. Gradually, the Pandava forces began to break through the Kaurava front lines, and the warriors on Duryodhana's side, overwhelmed by fear, sought escape from the battlefield. Yet, Drona, their preceptor, castigated them, his voice laced with scorn. "Heroes do not flee! I shall provide you with protection!" Stirred by their teacher's words, the multitude of soldiers mustered their resolve and returned to the fray, their spirits reignited.

Drona, like a relentless storm, tore through the ranks of the Pandavas, cutting down thousands of soldiers in his path. He penetrated deep into their midst, his eyes searching for the opportune moment to seize Yudhisthira. But Kumara, a fierce warrior guarding Yudhisthira's chariot, emerged to block Drona's advance, releasing a volley of a thousand arrows. Unwilling to tolerate this defiance, Drona swiftly severed the head of the brave warrior. As Drona inched closer to Yudhisthira's chariot, a collective force comprising Virata, Drupada, Satyaki, Singhasena, and Vyaghradatta—the Prince of Panchala—launched their attack upon him. Vyaghradatta pierced Drona with fifty arrows, while Singhasena too made his valiant attempt. However, Drona unleashed two broadheaded shafts from his mighty bow, severing the heads of those warriors. With no one left to oppose him, Drona closed in on Yudhisthira, a sense of impending doom resonating through the troops. "The King is doomed! Today, surely, Drona shall capture Yudhisthira!" echoed the cries.

Yet, in the midst of this dire situation, the heavens resounded with the resolute twang of Arjuna's Gandiva bow. The Pandava

warrior, like a force of nature, swept through the Kaurava ranks, leaving behind a trail of carnage. Arjuna arrived at Drona's division, unleashing his celestial arsenal upon every warrior, sowing chaos and confusion in their ranks. Determined to safeguard his elder brother, Arjuna's arrows flew with such speed that it seemed as if he plucked them from the quiver and released them in the same breath. It was a dance of death performed in the blink of an eye. Witnessing Arjuna's wrath, both Drona and Duryodhana ordered a retreat for the day, realizing the futility of their efforts. The Shrinjayas and the Panchalas erupted in jubilation at Arjuna's triumphant display, their conch shells heralding his glorious victory.

Within the confines of the Kaurava camp, Duryodhana convened an assembly of the kings to assess the day's events. Amidst the gathering, Drona spoke with conviction, his words laced with strategic cunning. "I have forewarned you, my comrades, that as long as Arjuna stands beside Yudhisthira, it shall be nigh impossible for me to capture him. Our endeavors to subdue him were thwarted even when the mightiest warriors assailed him. Let there be no doubt in your minds: Krishna and Arjuna are invincible. However, if we can successfully separate Arjuna from the King, then the capture of Yudhisthira shall be within our grasp. Let someone rise to the challenge, draw Arjuna away from this part of the battlefield. The son of Kunti shall not return until he has vanquished his foe. In the meantime, while Partha is engrossed in combat, I shall seize the opportunity to capture Yudhisthira. In the presence of Dhristadyumna, I shall bring the King under my control. This plan shall yield far greater rewards than the defeat of the entire Pandava army."

Upon hearing Drona's scheme, Susharman, the Trigarta King, stepped forward willingly, his voice filled with determination. "We have endured humiliation at Arjuna's hands time and again. Though we have never harmed him, he relentlessly seeks our lives. Our hearts burn with anger, and sleep eludes us at night. Tomorrow, we shall confront him, my brothers and I—

Satyaratha, Satyavarman, Satyavrata, and Satyeshu. We shall challenge Arjuna in battle, drawing him away to another part of the field. We vow this day to either slay Arjuna or fall in battle. Retreat is not an option. These are our solemn words!" Having pledged their oath, those noble kings retired for the night, awaiting the break of dawn when they would fulfill their vows.

Chapter 31

The Twelfth Day of battle Bhagadatts Rampage

As the night waned and the dawn approached, Drona orchestrated the alignment of his troops in the formidable formation known as Garuda. Like the mythical bird, this formation was fierce and unyielding. At the forefront of Garuda stood Duryodhana, supported by his remaining brothers. Kritavarman and Kripa, stalwart warriors, formed the piercing eyes of this colossal avian arrangement. Bhurishrava, Salya, Somadatta, and Bahlika, surrounded by a mighty akshauhini division, constituted the right wing, while Vinda, Anuvinda, Sudakshina, the ruler of Kambhoja, and Ashvatthama formed the left. In the midst of this grand assembly stood the indomitable Bhagadatta, King of Pragjyotishapura, mounted upon his invincible elephant, Supritika. He was accompanied by numerous kings hailing from the realms of China and Huna. The Samsaptakas, an ardent group of warriors bound by an oath to either conquer or perish, took their positions in a crescent-shaped formation. King Susharman and his brothers led them, their resolve unwavering—to slay Arjuna or meet their own demise. Witnessing this impenetrable formation, Yudhisthira organized his forces into a defensive half-circle.

With the commencement of battle, the Trigartas issued their challenge to Arjuna. The Samsaptakas, upon seeing Arjuna's approach, erupted in exultation, their jubilant cries reverberating through the sky. But Arjuna, a smile upon his lips, turned to Krishna, the lotus-eyed Lord, and spoke, "Behold, O son of Devaki, these Trigarta brothers who shall soon meet their doom. Instead of lamenting, they rejoice." Drawing forth his divine conch, the Devadatta, Arjuna blew it with resounding force.

Instantly, fear gripped the Samsaptakas, wiping away their joyous expressions, leaving them paralyzed and motionless. Their steeds halted, and with wide eyes, they involuntarily voided their bowels. Regaining their senses, the Samsaptakas launched their attack upon Arjuna, releasing a hailstorm of arrows in a desperate bid to claim his life. Yet, the son of Kunti, with his swift arrows, shattered their onslaught, slicing through their projectiles effortlessly. With a single, broad-headed arrow, he severed the leather gloves worn by Susharman's brother, Suvahu. In retaliation, Sudharman, Sudhanvan, and Suvahu unleashed ten arrows each upon Arjuna. Incensed by their audacity, Arjuna decimated Sudhanvan's steeds before beheading him, his turbaned head a testament to his valor. Witnessing the fall of their comrade, the remaining warriors fled, gripped by terror.

King Susharman, resolute and undeterred, rallied his troops, reminding them of their sworn oath. They returned to the fray, their determination unyielding. Observing their tenacity, Arjuna turned to Hrishikesha, Krishna, and commanded, "Urge the horses, Krishna, towards the Samsaptakas. They shall not retreat from this battle without meeting their doom. Today, I shall devour these warriors like a wildfire consumes a forest." As the multitude of warriors closed in on Arjuna, their arrows blanketed the chariot of Krishna and Arjuna. Once again, Arjuna blew his mighty conch, releasing the Tvashtra weapon. This formidable weapon cast the illusion of innumerable Krishnas and Arjunas, bewildering the Samsaptakas, who, deluded by the mirage, turned upon one another, believing each to be the incarnate forms of Krishna and Arjuna. In a frenzy of confusion, they pierced and slaughtered their own comrades, exclaiming, "There is Arjuna! This one is Krishna!" Their cries filled the air as they engaged in self-inflicted carnage. When the illusion dissipated, those remaining in the Samsaptaka army charged towards Arjuna like moths drawn into a blazing inferno. Weapons filled the sky, obscuring vision, prompting Krishna to inquire, "Amidst this dense darkness, Partha, I cannot see you. Are you still among the living, O slayer of foes?" But Arjuna,

silent and resolute, invoked the Vayavya astra, carried by the wind god, which swept away the multitude of weapons, horses, elephants, and charioteers like the wind scatters dry leaves. In that state of wrath, Arjuna decapitated their heads, severed their arms and legs, causing blood to flow like a river, immersing foot soldiers ankle-deep in a morass of gore.

In the midst of the chaotic battlefield, Drona, the formidable preceptor, wreaked havoc among the ranks of the Pandava forces. Observing Drona's approach, Yudhisthira turned to Dhristadyumna and urgently cautioned, "O son of Drupada, Drona draws near, his aim set on capturing me. Take every precaution to prevent his abduction." Dhristadyumna assured the king, "Fear not, O noble ruler. Drona shall never lay a hand on you. Today, I shall impede his advance and vanquish his followers. As long as I draw breath, you need not harbor any anxiety. I have taken birth for the sole purpose of ending Drona's life, and under no circumstances shall he overcome me."

With this solemn pledge, the valiant son of Drupada launched himself at Drona, unleashing a torrent of arrows that scattered like a tempest. Witnessing his progress hindered, Durmuka, a formidable warrior, stepped forward to confront Dhristadyumna, overpowering him with a barrage of deadly weapons. As the two warriors clashed, Drona began to decimate Yudhisthira's divisions with his celestial weaponry. Observing Drona drawing near, Yudhisthira unleashed a barrage of hundreds of arrows, seeking to halt his relentless advance. Satyajit, the warrior entrusted by Arjuna to safeguard Yudhisthira, released a celestial weapon that pierced Drona's body in multiple places. He then targeted the preceptor's charioteer with five arrows and his horses with seven, shattering the royal emblem adorning Drona's chariot and roaring triumphantly. Witnessing the awe-inspiring feats of the mighty Satyajit, Drona resolved that the prince of Panchala should be sent to the realm of the departed. Drona shattered Satyajit's bow and pierced him with ten sharp shafts. Undeterred, Satyajit seized another bow and showered Drona with thirty arrows. The mighty charioteer Vrika pierced

Drona's chest with sixty arrows, displaying audacity in the face of the preceptor's wrath. Unwilling to tolerate such impudence, Drona shattered the bows of both Vrika and Satyajit and swiftly dispatched Vrika with a broad-headed shaft, severing Satyajit's head with a crescent-shaped arrow. Drona relentlessly proceeded to slay the foremost chariot fighters among the Pandavas, one after another. With nine arrows, he toppled Dridhasena, and with twenty more, he laid low Kshema, the leader of a chariot division. Advancing towards Yudhisthira, Drona claimed the lives of mighty warriors such as Kshatradeva and the Pandava general Vasudeva. Witnessing his heroic comrades fall, King Yudhisthira wisely retreated to another part of the battlefield to evade capture.

Amidst this unfolding drama, Duryodhana charged fiercely at Bhima, his arch-nemesis. Bhima, spotting his adversary surrounded by a contingent of formidable elephants, licked his lips in anticipation. With sheer might and powerful arrows, Bhima assailed the elephant army, piercing through their colossal frames. Covered in a hail of hundreds of arrows, the mighty beasts either fled in terror or collapsed lifeless upon the ground. Incensed by Bhima's success, Duryodhana retaliated, unleashing a barrage of sharp arrows. Undeterred, Bhima shattered Duryodhana's bow and royal standard, releasing a thunderous roar that echoed across the battlefield, akin to a mighty lion proclaiming its dominance. Coming to protect Duryodhana, the Anga King charged atop his own elephant. Bhima swiftly dispatched the elephant, driving a long-shafted arrow through its head, directly between its eyes. With its life extinguished, the elephant crashed to the earth, its severed head suspended by the arrow before it sank into the ground. Seizing the moment, Bhima swiftly beheaded the Mleccha king with a crescent-shaped arrow. Witnessing Bhima's awe-inspiring display of power, the elephant army broke ranks, fleeing in disarray from the battlefield, their spirits shattered.

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As the battle raged on, Bhima, the indomitable warrior known as Vrikodara, shattered the enemy troops with his sheer might. The ruler of Pragjyotishapura, Bhagadatta, seething with fury, mounted his majestic white elephant, Supritika, and charged toward Bhima. Sensing the imminent clash, Bhima swiftly descended from his chariot, ready to face his adversary head-on.

In the blink of an eye, Supritika, the behemoth of an elephant, crushed Bhima's chariot and horses with its mighty front legs, reducing them to wreckage. Unfazed, Bhima, fueled by his untamed strength, darted beneath the colossal creature and unleashed a barrage of bare-fisted blows upon its colossal form. The elephant, tormented by Bhima's relentless strikes, spun in a frenzied attempt to trample him underfoot. Yet Bhima, emerging unscathed from beneath the monstrous beast, stood his ground, defiant and resolute. Supritika, driven by a surge of fury, seized Bhima by the neck with its trunk and hurled him forcefully to the ground. However, Bhima swiftly rose, breaking free from the elephant's grip, and once again sought refuge beneath its towering presence.

This was no ordinary elephant; it seemed invincible, impervious even to Bhima's might. Realizing the futility of his current endeavor, Bhima dashed out from beneath the colossal creature, retreating to a safe distance, biding his time for the arrival of his own elephant army.

Soon, the King of the Dasarnas, astride his mammoth elephant, charged forth, launching a relentless assault upon Supritika. With a whirlwind of movement, Supritika tore open the flank of the enemy elephant, vanquishing it without mercy. However, Bhagadatta, the indomitable ruler, armed with seven lances, dispatched the Dasarna King and his fallen elephant with a swift and fatal strike.

As Yudhisthira, the valiant king of the Pandavas, witnessed the demise of his ally, he rallied his foremost chariot fighters, surrounding Bhagadatta with a multitude of arrows. Undeterred by the overwhelming number of mighty warriors closing in on him, the ruler of Pragjyotishapura urged his elephant toward Satyaki's chariot. With unstoppable force, the colossal elephant pushed through the encircling chariots, seizing Satyaki's chariot with its powerful trunk. Satyaki, quick-witted and nimble, leaped to safety, but the enraged elephant raised the chariot high into the sky, then ruthlessly slammed it onto the ground, reducing it to rubble along with the horses. The mighty beast proceeded to snatch the chariot fighters, flinging them mercilessly to the earth.

Undeterred, Bhima, unyielding in his pursuit, once again charged at the colossal elephant, thundering toward it upon his magnificent chariot. Yet, Supritika, cunning and resourceful, sprayed water from its trunk, drenching the horses and causing them to rear up, veering Bhima away from the chaotic battlefield. Meanwhile, Ruchiparvan, the valiant son of Kirti, mounted upon his chariot, swiftly assailed Bhagadatta, releasing a relentless storm of arrows in all directions. However, King Bhagadatta, unyielding and fierce, dispatched the formidable warrior to the abode of Yamaraja with a single deadly shaft.

In a desperate bid to halt the indomitable Supritika, warriors such as Abhimanyu, the brave sons of Draupadi, Chekitana, Dhristaketu, and Yuyutsu launched their assault. But as these mighty warriors neared the gargantuan elephant, Supritika ruthlessly trampled Yuyutsu's horses, grinding them into a grotesque pile of shattered bones and blood-soaked flesh. The colossal creature then seized the chariot driver, hurling him to the unforgiving ground, instantly snuffing out his life. Yuyutsu, rendered utterly helpless, fled to a distant place, consumed by a sense of overwhelming defeat.

Chapter 32

Arjuna vs Bhagadatta

As the dust cloud loomed in the distance and the cries of the troops filled the air, Arjuna, with eyes like lotus petals, turned to Krishna, the slayer of Madhu. "Krishna," he said, "the ruler of Pragjyotishapura has unleashed havoc upon our forces. He wields the mightiest elephant in the world, a divine beast impervious to all weapons. It seems nothing can harm it, not even fire. Our army will be crushed unless we put a stop to it. None but us can subdue this creature. Hurry, Krishna! We must confront Bhagadatta and slay him, along with his magnificent white elephant!"

Following his devotee's command, Lord Krishna steered the chariot toward King Bhagadatta. But the Samsaptakas, relentless in their challenge, refused to let Arjuna pass. Determined to eliminate this threat, Arjuna decided to deal with the Samsaptakas first. He invoked the formidable Brahma weapon, and from the heavens, a deluge of hundreds of thousands of arrows rained down upon the enemy. Those arrows severed arms, legs, and heads, leaving the warriors lifeless, falling from their chariots, horses, and elephants. Such was the devastating power of this celestial weapon. Gigantic elephants, towering like mountains, lay sprawled on the battlefield, their sides and heads split open, gushing with blood and flesh. Having slain thousands upon thousands of warriors with his celestial arsenal, Arjuna commanded Lord Krishna, "Head toward Bhagadatta!"

Lord Krishna urged the horses forward, aiming for Bhagadatta. But once again, Arjuna was met with a challenge, this time from Susharman. Perplexed, Arjuna sought guidance from the lotus-

eyed Lord. "Krishna, Susharman confronts me again, and our army is being crushed from the north by Drona and Bhagadatta. Should I vanquish the Samsaptakas or rescue our divisions from further peril?" Lord Krishna, without uttering a word, turned the chariot around, directing the horses toward the Samsaptakas. Arjuna pierced Susharman, the Trigarta King, with seven arrows to the chest. Susharman retaliated, launching a dart at Arjuna and a lance at Lord Krishna. Swiftly, Arjuna shattered the dart and the lance, and with his celestial weapons, unleashed a downpour of destruction upon Susharman's chariot, leaving him senseless. He then scattered the Samsaptaka forces and, turning his chariot northward, made his way to Bhagadatta.

As King Bhagadatta caught sight of Lord Krishna and Arjuna's chariot, he unleashed a torrent of weapons toward them. But Arjuna, stringing his Gandiva bow, released arrows that pulverized those weapons before they could find their mark. Undeterred, Bhagadatta urged his elephant forward, intent on trampling the chariot of Lord Krishna and Arjuna. With his divine prowess, Lord Krishna deftly maneuvered the chariot out of harm's way. Though Arjuna had the opportunity to strike the King and his elephant from behind, he refrained, mindful of the rules of warfare. Supritika, meanwhile, rampaged through the ranks of elephants and chariots, leaving nothing but destruction in its wake. Arjuna could not tolerate this, and he launched another assault on Bhagadatta. The King of Pragjyotishapura, in turn, pierced Lord Krishna with iron-tipped arrows adorned with golden feathers. These arrows, unleashed from Bhagadatta's bow, tore through the transcendental body of Lord Krishna and buried themselves in the earth. Yet, the Lord's spiritual body, beyond the clutches of material laws, remained untouched by pain or death. Though he played the role of an ordinary mortal, the Lord's divine essence could not be harmed, for his body was composed of eternal knowledge and bliss, beyond the material realm.

Arjuna wasted no time. With a swift stroke, he severed Bhagadatta's bow and swiftly dispatched the men guarding the elephant's legs. Enraged, the King of Pragjyotishapura hurled forth fourteen javelins, radiant as the sun's rays. But Arjuna, displaying his exceptional skill, cleaved each javelin into three pieces and shattered the armor that encased the mighty beast. Undeterred, Bhagadatta launched an iron dart adorned with golden embellishments. Arjuna swiftly sliced it in two, followed by severing the king's royal umbrella and banner. He pierced Bhagadatta with ten arrows, provoking the monarch's fury. In retaliation, Bhagadatta unleashed two lances that struck Arjuna's crown, causing it to waver momentarily. Arjuna swiftly readjusted his crown and bellowed at Bhagadatta, "Behold your imminent demise, O mighty king!"

Infuriated by Arjuna's words, Bhagadatta brandished a golden bow and unleashed a relentless storm of arrows towards Lord Krishna and Arjuna. But before the arrows reached their mark, Arjuna shattered them and the bow itself, piercing Bhagadatta with seventy-two arrows. Overwhelmed by excruciating pain, the ruler of Pragjyotishapura seethed with anger. Summoning celestial mantras, he transformed his elephant hook into a Vaishnava weapon and hurled it, intent on ending Arjuna's life. Yet, to his astonishment, the weapon struck Lord Krishna's chest, transforming into a garland of flowers. Arjuna, disapprovingly, admonished the lotus-eyed Lord, "Hrishikesha, your role is to guide my horses, not to intervene in battle. Why do you disregard your vow? Protect me only when I am in dire straits, not when I am fully capable of vanquishing the enemy. You know well that I possess the power to decimate the hosts of gods and demons."

Listening intently, Lord Krishna replied, "Listen, Partha, to the secret and history behind this weapon. Once, Mother Earth beseeched me to grant a boon to her son, the demon Narakasura. She sought the invincibility of the Vaishnava weapon, which could shield her son from even the combined might of gods and demons. Yielding to her request, I bestowed upon her that

mighty weapon, enabling Narakasura to conquer the three worlds. He subdued Indra and claimed the earrings of Aditi. He even seized a portion of the heavenly Mount Meru. Eventually, I journeyed to Pragjyotishapura and slayed Narakasura. That very Vaishnava weapon has been passed down to Bhagadatta, and he seeks to use it to end your life. None can overcome that weapon except myself. That is why I broke my promise. Now that Bhagadatta has been stripped of his weapon, his elephant can be slain, and you can exact revenge on the king, just as I did to his father for the betterment of the world."

Understanding the gravity of the situation, a smile played on Arjuna's lips. He unleashed a torrent of arrows upon Bhagadatta, resembling a golden shaft granted to him by Indra. With unerring aim, Arjuna pierced Supritika's forehead, cleaving the elephant's head in two. Despite Bhagadatta's desperate urging, the elephant remained motionless, its limbs paralyzed, until it collapsed lifeless upon the earth. As the mighty beast fell, Arjuna aimed a crescent-headed arrow that pierced Bhagadatta's chest. Struck by this divine weapon, the ruler of Pragjyotishapura relinquished his grip on bow and arrow, tumbling from his elephant. Like a lotus petal descending from its sacred flower, the ornate turban adorning his head came undone. Lying on the ground, bedecked with golden garlands, splendid attire, and precious ornaments, Bhagadatta's lifeless body appeared resplendent. Arjuna descended from his chariot, circumambulated the fallen hero, paid his respects, and then mounted the chariot once more, ready to inflict further devastation upon the Kaurava ranks.

After the demise of Bhagadatta, two of Shakuni's brothers, Vrishaka and Achala, launched an attack on Arjuna. Vrishaka unleashed a barrage of arrows from the front, while Achala rained arrows upon him from behind. Arjuna swiftly eliminated Vrishaka's horses and charioteer before slaying five hundred Gandhara warriors who charged at him with weapons raised.

The mighty Vrishaka, undeterred, mounted Achala's chariot, and together they launched an assault on Arjuna. However, with a single arrow, Arjuna vanquished both warriors standing side by side on their chariot, ensuring their journey to a divine destination upon witnessing Lord Krishna and Arjuna in their final moments.

Unwilling to tolerate the loss of his brothers, Shakuni himself stepped forward to confront Arjuna. Skilled in mystic illusions, he conjured a multitude of clubs, iron balls, rocks, Sataghnis, darts, maces, bludgeons, scimitars, lances, mallets, axes, razors, and arrows, which descended upon Lord Krishna and Arjuna's chariot. Arjuna, undaunted, beheld a horde of asses, camels, buffaloes, tigers, lions, carnivorous deer, leopards, bears, wolves, vultures, and Rakshasas rushing toward him. Employing his celestial weapons, Partha pierced each of those illusory creatures, causing them to fall to the ground, shrieking in terror. Darkness then enveloped Lord Krishna and Arjuna's chariot, from which resounding voices chastised the son of Kunti. In response, Jishnu unleashed the Jyotisha weapon, illuminating the surroundings in all directions. As the darkness dispersed, immense tidal waves appeared, only to be evaporated by Arjuna's deployment of the Aditya weapon. With his mystic powers exhausted, Shakuni had no choice but to flee the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the renowned Drona wreaked havoc, causing a massacre of colossal proportions. Dhristadyumna, Satyaki, and Bhima confronted him, shattering his mighty bow, but Drona persisted, slaying thousands upon thousands of men. Arjuna, steadily advancing, embarked on a path of destruction, breaking the rear of the Kaurava army, prompting anguished cries to echo across the battlefield.

Hearing the anguished cries of the troops, Karna emerged to challenge Arjuna. Karna invoked the Agneya weapon, directing it towards Arjuna, yet Partha deflected the attack with his own arrows. Dhristadyumna, Satyaki, and Bhima joined the fray

against Karna, but the valorous warrior thwarted their advances, piercing each of them with three arrows. Undeterred, these warriors retaliated, launching a barrage of darts at Radha's son, only to have Karna dismantle them with his own weapons. Arjuna, in turn, struck Karna with seven arrows, and with six more, he extinguished the life of one of Karna's brothers, Satrunjaya. Two more brothers of Karna met their demise at Arjuna's hands, one of them being Vipatha, whose head was severed in full view of Karna. Bhima, wielding his sword, leaped from his chariot and slew ten chariot fighters who supported Karna. Then mounting his chariot once again, Bhima pierced Karna with ten arrows. Dhristadyumna, seizing a sword, dispatched the ruler of the Naishadas, Vrihatkshatra, along with a king named Charmavarman. Satyaki, drawing another bow, impaled Karna with ten arrows, causing him to release his bow. In a desperate attempt to save Karna from certain death, Duryodhana, Drona, and Jayadratha rushed to engage Satyaki.

The battle intensified, with all combatants fighting recklessly, devoid of concern for their own lives. Infantry soldiers clashed with infantry soldiers, chariot fighters battled chariot fighters, and those on elephants engaged with chariot warriors. Foot soldiers confronted mounted cavalry, and the slaughter grew so immense that the entire battlefield became a ghastly spectacle, strewn with the corpses of horses, elephants, and men. Severed heads, their eyes bulging, lay scattered, teeth clenched in eternal rage. The field became so densely packed with lifeless bodies that it became impassable, and the chariots, instead of gliding along the ground, rode atop the fallen warriors. Exhausted and mutilated, both armies, upon the descent of the sun and the resounding sound of the conchshell signaling the end of the day's battle, retreated to their respective tents to rest for the night.

Chapter 33

The Thirteenth Day at Kurukshetra;

O King, your troops lay defeated, broken by the relentless prowess of Arjuna. As they retreated under the cover of night, the memory of Arjuna's countless feats and his unwavering friendship with the lotus-eyed Krishna haunted their thoughts. Resting as if cursed, they spoke little and found no solace. With the break of dawn, Duryodhana, fueled by anger, confronted Drona with sharp words, "O best of the brahmanas, look at the great carnage inflicted upon my army by the sons of Pritha. By allowing this, you have marked us for destruction. Despite the opportunity, you failed to capture Yudhisthira. A person of your noble character should always uphold your vow in all circumstances."

Chastised by Duryodhana's words, Bharadvaja's son felt a deep sense of shame. He replied to the King, "O Duryodhana, I have done my best to capture Yudhisthira. However, as long as Arjuna protects the Pandava army, it cannot be defeated by any force in this world. Wherever Lord Krishna, the creator of the universe, and Arjuna, the son of Kunti, stand together, there has never been, nor is there, nor will there ever be anyone who can vanquish them. I have always told you this, and it remains true. Today, I promise you that one of the adhirathas on the Pandava's side will meet his end. I will create a formation so impenetrable that even the gods themselves will struggle to breach it. It is known as the Chakravyuha. But it can only succeed if Arjuna is lured away from the battlefield. Arjuna knows the secret of

breaking through this formation, and as long as he is present, our efforts will be in vain."

The preceptor then organized his forces into the formidable Chakravyuha formation. At its core were the invincible maharathis, including Drona himself, Karna, Salya, Kripa, Ashvatthama, Duryodhana, Jayadratha, Duhshasana, and Bhurishrava. Surrounding these division leaders were millions upon millions of soldiers.

The Pandavas, led by Bhima, approached the impenetrable array protected by Drona. Satyaki, Chekitana, Dhristadyumna, Kuntibhoja, Drupada, Abhimanyu, and others joined them, ready to fight Drona. But despite their efforts, they were pushed back like waves crashing upon the shore. Drona's strength was overwhelming, and he defeated them one by one or in groups. Recognizing Drona as invincible, Yudhisthira placed a heavy burden upon Abhimanyu. He addressed Abhimanyu, who was no less than Vasudeva in prowess, and requested, "O child, fight in such a way that Arjuna will not rebuke us when he returns from battling the Samsaptakas. None here knows how to break this circular formation that is about to devour my divisions. Only Krishna, Arjuna, Pradyumna, and yourself possess the knowledge to pierce this array. O mighty warrior, no fifth person can accomplish this feat. O Abhimanyu, grant us this favor. Take up your arms and shatter this formation before Arjuna's return."

"I will penetrate Drona's Chakravyuha," Abhimanyu replied, "and bring victory to my father and uncles. Arjuna has taught me the secret to break through this array. But I do not know how to escape it if I fall into danger."

"O foremost of warriors," Yudhisthira beseeched, "break this formation just once, and we will follow you, providing protection. Have no fear, for once we are inside that great formation, we will demolish it."

"Today," Abhimanyu declared, "I will penetrate Drona's invincible formation, and you shall witness the slaughter of vast divisions by a mere boy. If anyone encounters me and escapes with his life, I will not consider myself Arjuna's son. Today, I will decimate the entire Kaurava army."

Abhimanyu then ordered his charioteer to advance toward Drona. His charioteer, Sumitra, cautioned the intelligent son of Arjuna, "You bear a heavy burden imposed by the Pandavas. You must carefully consider whether you can bear this weight. The preceptor Drona is a master of superior weapons and seasoned in battle. You are still a youth, brought up in luxury and unaccustomed to the frontlines of warfare."

Laughing resolutely, Abhimanyu replied to his charioteer, "O Sumitra, who is this Drona? Who are any of these mortal warriors? I have the courage to face Indra himself, let alone these ordinary soldiers gathered here. Endowed with the vitality and strength of my uncle Krishna and my father Arjuna, I do not flinch at the thought of challenging anyone." Ignoring his charioteer's words, Abhimanyu commanded, "Drive this chariot toward the preceptor Drona!"

As the charioteer urged the horses forward, Abhimanyu, adorned in golden armor with the emblem of a Karnikara tree, charged fearlessly toward Drona like a lion attacking a herd of elephants. The Kaurava warriors, with thunderous roars, tried to halt his progress, but Abhimanyu, undeterred, cleaved through the formidable formation, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake. As the enemy forces desperately sought to close the gap, Abhimanyu swiftly dispatched them, severing heads, arms, and legs with his mighty weapons. They were like moths drawn to a flame, their futile attempts to stop him resulting in their own demise.

The battlefield became a scene of carnage, strewn with fallen heroes adorned in golden armor, fragrant garlands, and

sandalwood paste. Bodies lay lifeless, tongues lolling, eyes detached, and entrails exposed, victims of Abhimanyu's deadly arrows. The Kaurava ranks crumbled under his relentless assault, and panic gripped their hearts as they fled in disarray.

Enraged by the sight of his shattered army, Duryodhana himself charged at Subhadra's valiant son, knowing full well that he stood no chance against the young warrior. Sensing the impending danger, Drona commanded his esteemed warriors—Ashvatthama, Kripa, Salya, Karna, and others—to protect the enraged king. They rained down arrows upon Abhimanyu, attempting to whisk Duryodhana away, but the young hero stood undeterred. With a resounding roar of victory, he challenged each warrior, piercing them with his deadly arrows. Undeterred, the great warriors unleashed their weapons, aiming to slay Arjuna's son, but Abhimanyu effortlessly shattered their onslaught, countering their arrows with his own.

The son of King Asmaka managed to draw close and pierce Abhimanyu with ten arrows, but the young warrior swiftly retaliated, killing the horses and charioteer of his assailant before severing his arms and head. When Karna approached, Abhimanyu pierced the armor of the mighty warrior, and his blood-sucking arrows penetrated deep into Karna's body and into the earth itself. Struck unconscious, Karna collapsed on the floor of his chariot. Abhimanyu continued his relentless onslaught, challenging and defeating every warrior who crossed his path. He confronted Salya, the ruler of Madras, showering him with golden arrows, causing him to faint and be carried away from the battlefield.

Witnessing Abhimanyu's awe-inspiring triumph, the demigods, Pitris, Charanas, and Siddhas resounded with celestial praises from the heavens above. Meanwhile, Salya's brother assaulted Abhimanyu like a raging storm, raining arrows upon him and letting out a thunderous roar. But Abhimanyu countered with a barrage of his own, obliterating the horses, charioteer, royal standard, wheels, and canopy of his opponent's chariot. He

shattered the brother's weapons into pieces before severing his head, causing the supporting troops to flee in fear of their lives.

After rallying his troops, Abhimanyu found himself surrounded by a horde of raging warriors, all determined to put an end to his valiant existence. But the young hero, with a mischievous smile playing on his lips, taunted them with the weapons bestowed upon him by Krishna and Arjuna. He bore the weight of Yudhisthira's command without faltering, fearlessly unleashing a relentless storm of arrows. Like Arjuna himself, his bow seemed to be in a perpetual state of motion, a whirlwind of destruction. No one could discern the moment he drew an arrow from his quiver or when it was set free upon the world. The other Pandavas, captivated by his prowess, stood back as mere spectators, awestruck by his magnificent display.

Duryodhana, consumed by madness at the sight of his crumbling army, urged his great maharathis, "Drona, out of foolish affection, spares Arjuna's son. But mark my words, when provoked, even Drona's wrath is an unstoppable force. Abhimanyu's victory is a result of his favoritism. I command you all, crush him without mercy!"

Taking his brother's words to heart, Duhshasana swore, "O monarch, I swear upon my life that I will slay Arjuna's son in the very presence of the Pandavas. I shall devour Abhimanyu like Rahu devours the sun. And when the two Krishnas learn of his demise, they too shall succumb to the depths of despair. With their demise, victory will be ours. The death of this single warrior will seal our triumph."

With determination fueling his every move, Duhshasana charged at Abhimanyu, unleashing a barrage of mighty weapons upon him. Undeterred, Abhimanyu taunted him, his voice laced with defiance, "Fortunate is this day that I lay eyes upon you, the epitome of arrogance and folly. In the grand assembly at Hastinapura, you insulted Draupadi, my father, and my uncles.

O wicked soul, today you shall pay for your transgressions. I shall chastise you before the entire army. Today, I shall free myself from the debt I owe to the furious Krishna and my father, who eagerly awaits the chance to confront you. O Kaurava, if you flee this battlefield, only then shall you escape with your miserable life."

Having spoken his challenge, Abhimanyu invoked a celestial weapon, radiant and awe-inspiring. With a flick of his wrist, he released the arrow imbued with lightning speed, piercing Duhshasana's shoulder joint to the very feathers. Another twenty-five arrows followed suit, resembling tongues of fire in their ferocity. Overwhelmed by excruciating pain, Duhshasana collapsed onto the chariot floor, slipping into a deathly swoon. His lifeless body was swiftly removed from the battlefield. The Pandavas, witnessing this triumph, erupted in joy, their victory resounding through the air with the triumphant blast of conches, drums, and bugles.

Karna, undeterred by his brother's fate, stepped forward to face Abhimanyu. He unleashed a flurry of arrows, each one straining the limits of his bow. But the son of Phalguna felt no pain, retaliating with deadly precision. His arrows found their mark, piercing Karna's horses and charioteer, stripping him of his royal standard, and shattering his bow into fragments. As the Kaurava heroes erupted in cheer, Abhimanyu, cool and composed, released a single shaft that severed the head of Karna's brother. The once-smirking faces of the Kauravas were now twisted with disbelief. Karna, consumed by fury and driven by vengeance, mounted another chariot, assaulting Abhimanyu with unbridled anger. Yet, the young warrior effortlessly shattered his bow and deflected his weapons, leaving Karna with no choice but to retreat in defeat.

With the Kaurava army routed and scattered, there remained only one adversary before Abhimanyu: Jayadratha, the ruler of Sindhu. The warrior, resolute and untiring, blew his conch shell,

its resounding blast echoing across the battlefield, bringing immeasurable joy to his uncles, the Pandavas.

Chapter 34

Heroic Abhimanyu

Sanjaya's voice rang out, recounting the fierce pursuit of the Pandavas, accompanied by stalwart warriors like Satyaki, Shikhandi, Dhristadyumna, Virata, Drupada, and Dhristaketu, as they followed the wake of destruction left by the son of Dhananjaya. Their hearts burned with the hope of rescuing Abhimanyu from the treacherous Kaurava sea. Yet, their path was blocked by none other than Jayadratha, the ruler of Sindhu, your son-in-law. A powerful scion of Vriddhakshatra, he invoked his celestial arsenal, staunchly opposing the advance of those great heroes and sealing the breach in the formidable formation.

During their exile in the forest, Jayadratha had dared to insult Draupadi, only to be dealt a merciless thrashing by the mighty Bhimasena. Utterly humiliated, Jayadratha had resorted to rigorous penance, reducing his body to mere skin and bones. For days and nights, he subsisted on scant nourishment and fitful sleep, seeking to appease Lord Shiva. Eventually, the divine figure appeared to him in a dream, asking for his heart's desire. With folded palms, Jayadratha beseeched a boon that would grant him the power to vanquish the Pandavas, albeit excluding Arjuna. Lord Shiva granted him that very boon, thus empowering him to stand before them now like a raging lion.

Mounted upon a resplendent chariot drawn by Sindhu horses, Jayadratha displayed his royal banner emblazoned with a magnificent silver boar. With his bow taut, he unleashed a storm of arrows, impeding the Pandava army's progress. Satyaki endured three piercing shafts, while Bhima suffered the sting of eight. Dhristadyumna was struck by a relentless onslaught of sixty arrows, Shikhandi by ten, and Drupada by five. Yudhisthira found himself at the receiving end of seventy arrows, and the celestial weapons of Jayadratha rained upon the entire Pandava force. Yudhisthira managed to sever Jayadratha's bow, but the Sindhu King swiftly seized another, piercing Yudhisthira with ten arrows. Bhima, ever indomitable, shattered Jayadratha's bow, demolishing his royal standard and the splendid umbrella adorning his chariot. The formidable

Jayadratha, undeterred, seized yet another bow, laying waste to Bhima's chariot and horses. Bhima, undaunted, abandoned his crippled chariot and leapt onto Satyaki's, instilling the Kaurava army with renewed vigor. They surged forward, attempting to close the gap left by Abhimanyu's absence. Despite the desperate efforts of the Pandavas and their divisions, the Sindhu King, bound by Lord Shiva's benediction, halted their progress.

Meanwhile, Abhimanyu continued his relentless onslaught, cleaving through opposing divisions like a veritable force of nature. Vrishasena, the son of Karna, launched a full-scale attack, but Arjuna's son shattered his bow, slew his charioteer, and sent his standard tumbling from the chariot. Injured and defeated, Vrishasena was whisked away from the battlefield by his untamed horses. Vasatiya, a chariot division leader, then assailed Abhimanyu with a volley of hundreds of arrows. He pierced the valiant warrior, proclaiming, "As long as I draw breath, you shall not escape with your life!" However, before he could finish his boastful words, Abhimanyu pierced his armor, sending him to the realm of death.

The Kaurava host, numbering in the thousands, now converged upon Phalguna's son, determined to extinguish his blazing presence. Yet, as they approached, they met their doom, falling by the thousands, dispatched to the realm of the departed. Rukmaratha, the son of Salya, sought to deliver the Kaurava army from the surging tide of Abhimanyu's might. He rallied his forces, assuring them, "Fear not this son of Arjuna! I shall capture him alive and present him to you as a trophy." Vowing thus, Rukmaratha launched his assault, piercing Abhimanyu's chest with three arrows and his right and left arms with three more. Then he let out a mighty roar. However, Abhimanyu swiftly severed Rukmaratha's arms and cleaved off the hero's head. With the demise of Salya's valiant son, thousands of his comrades surged forward, determined to avenge his fall. They unleashed a deluge of weapons upon Abhimanyu, obscuring him from sight, convinced that he lay dead. Yet, fueled by unbridled rage and a thirst for vengeance, Abhimanyu invoked the

Gandharva weapon bestowed upon him by his father. Chaos erupted among Rukmaratha's troops, and in that tumultuous state, Abhimanyu dispatched them all to the afterlife.

As the shattered remnants of the Kaurava army fled the battlefield, Drona, Ashvatthama, Brihadvala, Kripa, and Duryodhana himself rushed at Abhimanyu, unleashing their formidable weapons. Yet, one by one, they were repelled, their efforts in vain. The sole challenger left to confront Abhimanyu was Lakshman, Duryodhana's young and skillful son, still inexperienced in the ways of warfare. With determination, Lakshman released his chosen arrows, aiming to strike down his opponent. Anxious for his son's safety, Duryodhana followed closely behind, accompanied by other chariot warriors who sought to protect him. Together, they unleashed a torrent of weapons upon Abhimanyu. Lakshman's arrows found their mark, piercing Abhimanyu's chest and arms. The valiant warrior roared defiantly, bolstering the spirits of the retreating troops. In that moment, Abhimanyu addressed Lakshman, his voice filled with unwavering resolve, "Behold your kinsmen for the last time, for in the presence of your father, I shall send you to Yamaraja's realm." With these words, Abhimanyu drew forth a broad-headed arrow, its form resembling a deadly serpent, and released it towards Duryodhana's son. Swift as a meteor, the arrow cleaved through the heavens, severing Lakshman's head. Witnessing the fall of his beloved son, Duryodhana seethed with fury and commanded Drona, Kripa, and Karna, "Slay this wretched individual!" Yet, Abhimanyu fought them off, even as they encircled him, their intent set upon his demise. Arjuna's son, undeterred, continued to traverse the battlefield like a tempest, swiftly making his way towards the divisions led by Jayadratha.

Drona, Karna, Kripa, Brihadvala, the mighty Kosala King, Kritavarman, and Ashvatthama stepped forward to confront Abhimanyu. The young warrior greeted them with a relentless storm of arrows. He pierced Drona with fifty shafts, Brihadvala

with twenty, Kritavarman with eight, and Kripa with sixty. Ashvatthama felt the sting of ten arrows, while Karna suffered a barbed arrow piercing his ear. Abhimanyu then struck down Kripa's horses and the charioteers protecting his chariot. In his path of destruction, he claimed the life of the valiant Vrindaraka, held dear by the Kaurava commanders.

Unyielding to Abhimanyu's success, Brihadvala, the ruler of the Koshalas, unleashed a barbed arrow that found its mark, piercing Abhimanyu's body. The King let out a resounding roar, having brought an Akshauhini division to fight against the Pandavas. Yet, Abhimanyu retaliated swiftly, striking Brihadvala in the chest with a long-shafted arrow, cleaving his heart in two. With the demise of this mighty warrior, Arjuna's son continued his relentless charge, leaving a wake of devastation in his path.

Even the formidable Karna could not halt Abhimanyu's advance. The young warrior swiftly dispatched Karna's six counselors who shielded his chariot. Abhimanyu then slew the son of Jayatsena, the ruler of Magadha, and with six arrows, he felled the great warrior Asvaketu. With a razor-headed arrow, Arjuna's son brought down the Bhoja prince Martikavata. The thunderous roar that erupted from Abhimanyu's lips filled the Kaurava army with dread.

When Shakuni, defeated by Abhimanyu, approached Duryodhana with his nefarious plan, he whispered, "None of us can vanquish him in single combat. Let all six of us challenge him at once and crush him." Hearing this treacherous scheme, the six mighty warriors—Drona, Karna, Kripa, Kritavarman, Ashvatthama, and Shakuni—conspired to find a way to slay Abhimanyu. Turning to Drona, Karna inquired, "Abhimanyu is invincible, impervious to our individual might. Tell us, O Drona, how can we overcome him?"

"I too am powerless to stand against this preeminent chariot driver as he traverses the battlefield," Drona replied with a heavy sigh. "The same dexterity and weapon mastery that resides in Arjuna is present in this young warrior. Abhimanyu pierces me deeply, causing me immense pain. He is youthful, yet his prowess is awe-inspiring. His armor is impenetrable. To halt his advance, we must sever his bowstring, slay his horses, and eliminate the guardians of his chariot when he least expects it. If we all unite and attack him simultaneously, we shall succeed."

In agreement with this wicked plan, Karna swiftly made his way to where Abhimanyu was locked in combat. While the valiant warrior was engaged with another foe, Karna surreptitiously cut his bowstring, seizing the opportunity. Following suit, Kritavarman struck down his horses, and Kripa eliminated the guardians of his chariot. Unjustly defeated on the battlefield, Abhimanyu's wrath ignited. The handsome son of Arjuna descended from his chariot, brandishing his sword, and charged toward the six mighty warriors, intent on slaying them. Yet, in an instant, Drona shattered his sword, and Karna shattered his shield. Undeterred, Abhimanyu seized a chariot wheel and lunged at Drona with the intent to kill. However, the other kings swiftly tore the wheel into pieces. Undaunted, the valiant charioteer then grasped a mace and sped toward Ashvatthama like the fury of the wind. Ashvatthama promptly dismounted from his chariot and fled in the opposite direction. Abhimanyu proceeded to kill Ashvatthama's horses and the warriors who shielded his chariot. Meanwhile, those cowardly so-called kings callously showered Abhimanyu with arrows as he fought on foot. His body became a pincushion, bristling with the shafts embedded within him. Abhimanyu then dispatched Kalikeya, Shakuni's son, along with seventy Gandhara followers. He went on to slay ten elephants and ten chariot warriors, steadily advancing toward Duhshasana's son.

By this point, Abhimanyu was weary and devoid of hope, yet he fought with the unwavering spirit befitting Arjuna's lineage.

Duhshasana's son dismounted from his chariot, armed with a mace, and charged at Abhimanyu, uttering, "Wait, wait!" Colliding with fierce determination, their weapons clashed simultaneously. Both warriors fell to the ground, and as Abhimanyu rose, Duhshasana's son struck him on the head, shattering his crown and extinguishing his life. There, on the vast expanse of Kurukshetra, he lay, resembling a mighty elephant felled by cowardly hunters. The assembled warriors erupted in cheer and jubilation, their victory cries resounding. From the heavens, a voice echoed, "Alas, Abhimanyu was slain unjustly by six mighty chariot warriors. This act is devoid of righteousness."

Hearing the disembodied voice, the Pandava warriors wept uncontrollably. Yudhisthira, overcome with anguish, lost consciousness and had to be revived with great effort. The renowned warriors gathered around Yudhisthira, their hearts heavy with sorrow, as they contemplated the memory of that youthful warrior, his radiant smile, and his unparalleled valor on the battlefield. In the absence of Krishna and Arjuna, this injustice had unfolded. Retreating to their tents for the night, they were at a loss for words to convey to Arjuna upon his return. Thus, they sat in solemn grief, encircling the son of Dharma, their spirits weighed down by sorrow's depths.

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Chapter 35

The Grief of Arjuna

Sanjaya spoke thus: "Listen, O King, as I recount in detail the oath taken by Arjuna in a grand assembly of kings and princes, which brought great joy to the Pandava warriors. After the slaying of the valiant Abhimanyu, who was but a young lad, the Pandava warriors returned to their encampments. They set aside their bows and armor, gathering around King Yudhisthira. Yudhisthira, overwhelmed by grief, lamented with these words:

'Alas, Abhimanyu, who sought my well-being, pierced through the chakravyuha formation devised by the preceptor Drona. Within that formation, the heroic son of Arjuna fought gallantly, slaying many renowned warriors of the Kaurava host. That youth, with eyes like lotus petals, was unjustly slain by six mighty chariot warriors. What can I say to Arjuna or to the blessed mother Subhadra? He, just a child, sacrificed himself without hesitation, fulfilling my command. Alas, when pierced by Arjuna's wrathful gaze, we too shall lay down our lives. Enraged at his son's slaughter, Partha will now unleash his fury upon the Kauravas. It is clear that the cruel-hearted Duryodhana desires the annihilation of his own army, as he sanctioned the death of that young boy.'

Sanjaya continued his narration: While King Yudhisthira lamented in this manner, the great sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa arrived. Yudhisthira immediately arranged for the revered sage's worship and, once the sage was comfortably seated, poured out his heart, saying, 'O great sage, what can I say about our welfare? While engaged in battle against mighty chariot warriors with malevolent intentions, the son of Subhadra was slain. He fearlessly entered Drona's formidable formation at my behest. Yet, we were obstructed by the ruler of the Sindhus, Jayadratha, in our attempts to protect him. Abhimanyu, though but a child, was butchered by those wicked Kauravas. I lament the loss of that great hero.'

Vyasadeva, in his wisdom, consoled the King, saying, 'O King Yudhisthira, O wise one well-versed in the Vedas, individuals like yourself never mourn over the lifeless bodies of others. You

know well that the soul is eternal and cannot be slain. This brave youth, having vanquished countless warriors, has ascended to the spiritual realm. Indeed, the destination he has attained is beyond the reach of even the greatest yogis, who may perform thousands of years of penance and austerities. O Bharata, death comes to all living beings; it is the natural law, and none can defy it. Abhimanyu now possesses a spiritual form befitting an inhabitant of the divine realm. He stands there, resplendent in his own radiance. Therefore, O Ajatashatru, grieve not for one who has attained perfection. It has already been ordained that a great slaughter of warriors shall occur on this Kurukshetra plain. The Supreme Personality of Godhead has decreed it, and none can alter that course. Be an instrument in this mighty battle. Fight your foes and achieve great glory.' Having imparted these words of wisdom, the venerable sage departed and returned to his ashrama.

Having received enlightenment from Vyasadeva, the Pandavas' grandfather, Yudhisthira found some solace regarding Abhimanyu's demise. Yet, in the very next moment, he pondered, 'What shall we say to Dhananjaya?' Thus, they anxiously awaited the return of Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

As the sun descended and the twilight cast its glow upon the sky, Arjuna made his way toward his tent, having vanquished a great number of Samsaptaka warriors. Observing inauspicious omens in every direction, he spoke to Lord Krishna, 'O Keshava, my words falter, and my heart is gripped with fear. My limbs grow feeble, and thoughts of calamity beset my mind. These are signs of great disaster. Surely, the death of a mighty warrior has befallen us. Let us hasten and inquire about Yudhisthira.'

Accelerating the pace of the horses, Lord Krishna, acting as the humble servant of His devotee, swiftly brought the chariot to where the kings and princes had gathered. Surveying the despondent warriors and the prevailing confusion, Vibhatsu addressed the Supreme Lord Krishna, saying, 'O Janardana, I hear no auspicious sounds of trumpets, drums, or conches. The

melodious strains of the vina and the joyous claps of hands are absent. The warriors do not rush to me to share their triumphs. Alas, my son Abhimanyu, perpetually cheerful, does not come alongside his brothers to welcome me upon my return from battle.'

When Krishna and Arjuna entered the camp, they beheld a scene of cheerlessness and profound grief among the Pandava warriors. Arjuna, not finding his son, inquired with a heavy heart, "Why are your faces pale, devoid of the sounds of victory? Where is my son Abhimanyu? Why does he not come to congratulate me? I have heard that the preceptor Drona formed his troops in the shape of a Chakra. Did you, out of despair, let my young boy enter that formation alone? Alas, has that valiant youth with lotus eyes pierced the mighty formation, fighting numerous warriors, only to surrender his life? Which warrior, devoid of sense, has slain my dearest son, the beloved of Draupadi and Keshava, and the cherished one of Kunti? What shall I say to Subhadra when I return without her son? What shall I say to Uttara, his dear wife, upon entering the palace? It would be better for me to enter Yamaraja's abode than to witness the tearful faces of those ladies."

To the grieving son of Kunti, the lotus-eyed Lord Krishna responded, "O son of Pandu, do not succumb to sorrow. Abhimanyu has treaded the path followed by all brave heroes. He has attained the abode reserved for exalted ascetics. Death is inevitable for one who does not retreat in battle. Do not grieve, O tiger among men. Those well-versed in the Vedas proclaim that the highest merit a Kshatriya can achieve is death on the battlefield while fighting the enemy. O best of the Bharatas, your brothers are despondent to witness you plunged into sorrow. Understand that the soul is eternal and that your son has attained perfection. Provide solace to your brothers and friends."

In response to Lord Krishna, Arjuna declared, "O Lord of the earth, I yearn to hear how Abhimanyu fought against the wicked Kauravas. You shall witness how I obliterate those who killed my son. I will slay them along with their allies and kin. All the great warriors present here were capable of safeguarding my son. How then did you allow him to be slain? Had I known that the Pandavas and Panchalas could not protect my son, I would have done so myself. Alas, none of you possess courage, prowess, or resolve, for in front of your eyes, Abhimanyu was slain. Perhaps, I should blame myself, for knowing that all of you were weak, cowardly, and irresolute, I departed. Alas, do you adorn yourselves with armor and splendid weapons merely for display? How is it that you failed to protect my son?" Arjuna then sat down, overwhelmed by grief and anger, clutching his bow and fine sword. None could approach him or address him except Yudhisthira or Lord Krishna.

Amidst the solemn silence, King Yudhisthira recounted how the Kauravas unjustly killed Abhimanyu, "O mighty-armed hero, after you had confronted the Samsaptakas, the preceptor Drona sought to capture me. We resisted Drona at every turn. However, the circular formation was impenetrable, and without you, our army would have been annihilated. Approaching Abhimanyu, we requested him to break the formation and lead the great warriors to victory. Agreeing to the proposal and equipping himself with the weapons you bestowed upon him, he ventured into the chakravyuha. We followed closely behind, eager to protect that lotus-eyed youth. Yet, the wretched Sindhu King, blessed by Lord Shiva, defeated us in battle. While we struggled against the vile Jayadratha, the formation closed in on us, and Abhimanyu found himself surrounded by six mighty Maharathis—Drona, Kripa, Karna, Asvatthama, Kritavarman, and Brihadvala, the King of the Koshalas. These craven men stripped Abhimanyu of his chariot and weapons. Fighting on foot, he met his ultimate fate at the hands of Duhshasana's son. Your son fought valiantly, slaying eight thousand chariot warriors, two thousand princes, and nine hundred elephants. He

slew King Brihadvala and Lakshman, Duryodhana's son. Departing in grandeur, he ascended to the celestial realms."

Arjuna seethed with fury. He clenched his hands, tears streaming from his lotus-like eyes. Casting wild glances, he swore, "I solemnly swear that I shall kill Jayadratha tomorrow! This despicable individual is the cause of my child's slaughter. I will cut down anyone who dares to protect him with my deadly arrows. Whether it be Drona, Kripa, or Karna, I will vanquish them all and slay the Sindhu King. I pledge that if the sun sets without Jayadratha's head severed, I will willingly enter a blazing fire. Let the Kauravas, the demigods, the Asuras, and the Rishis, whoever they may be, attempt to shield this sinful man—I will still sever the head of Abhimanyu's enemy." With these words, Arjuna stretched his Gandiva bow with both arms, its resounding twang reaching the heavens. After Arjuna made this vow, Janardana blew his conch, the Panchajanya, and Arjuna blew his, the Devadatta. The sound of Arjuna's vow echoed throughout the Pandava camp, accompanied by the harmonious melodies of numerous musical instruments.

As the words of Jayadratha's fear reached the ears of the assembly, a hushed silence fell over the warriors. Duryodhana, with his cunning mind, sought to console the trembling Sindhu King. He spoke with a voice that oozed false reassurance, "Fear not, Jayadratha, for you are under the protection of the mightiest warriors on our side. Karna, myself, Drona, Bhurishravas, Salya, Sudakshina, Vikarna, Duhshasana, Vinda and Anuvinda, Ashvatthama, Shakuni, and many others will stand as a shield before Arjuna's wrath. I command my eleven akshauhinis of troops to form a formidable defense, a wall that Arjuna himself will find difficult to breach. Banish your fear, Jayadratha, for the might of our combined strength shall crush any hope he harbors."

Buoyed by Duryodhana's hollow words, Jayadratha approached Drona, seeking guidance and reassurance. He asked the illustrious preceptor, "O wise teacher, I wish to know the true measure of my abilities compared to Arjuna. Enlighten me about the chances of survival in a battle against him."

Drona, ever the astute strategist, replied, "In terms of my instructions and training, both you and Arjuna stand equal. However, in terms of ascetic merit and righteous qualities, Arjuna surpasses you. But fret not, Jayadratha, for I shall personally ensure your safety. I will weave an impenetrable array that even Arjuna's divine arrows will struggle to breach. Do not let the specter of death haunt your mind. Remember, all mortals, whether Kauravas or Pandavas, meet their fate eventually, carrying with them the deeds of their lives. Act as a brave and valiant warrior should, fight your enemy, and fear not the outcome."

Jayadratha, his fear now dispelled by Drona's words, steeled himself for the impending battle. The sounds of joyous drums and kettledrums echoed through the Kaurava camp, announcing their readiness for the confrontation.

Yet, amidst this fervor, Lord Krishna, the mighty-armed, turned his attention to Arjuna. He spoke with a tone of caution and concern, "Arjuna, you have taken a solemn vow to slay Jayadratha without consulting me. But how do you plan to fulfill this oath? You have burdened yourself with a task that may prove arduous. I have learned from my spies that the Kaurava warriors have devised three formations to protect Jayadratha: the Shakata, the needle, and the formidable Chakravyuha. The distance between the front line and Jayadratha's position spans many miles. Guarding him will be six formidable Maharathis: Drona, Kripa, Karna, Asvatthama, Bhurishrava, and Vrishasena. Their combined prowess will be no easy match."

Arjuna, undeterred by Krishna's cautionary words, replied with unwavering determination, "Those six warriors you mention are

but shadows compared to my might. You shall witness, O slayer of Madhu, as I shatter their weapons and cleave through their defenses. I shall march steadfastly toward Jayadratha, disregarding the presence of Drona and the other great warriors. Even if the gods and demons themselves join forces to protect him, I will sever the head of the Sindhu King. I shall unleash the celestial weapons bestowed upon me by Yamaraja, Kuvera, Varuna, Indra, and Lord Shiva. Do not underestimate the power of my arms and the arsenal at my disposal. With my vow set, Jayadratha is already doomed. Moreover, with you, my friend and charioteer, by my side, victory over all the soldiers in the universe shall be within our grasp."

After his conversation with Lord Krishna, Arjuna made a heartfelt request to the divine charioteer, "O Janardana, I cannot bear to witness Subhadra's anguish as she mourns the loss of her son. I am at a loss for words to console her. I implore you, go to her and provide solace, easing her grief over the departure of Abhimanyu. Extend your comforting presence to Uttara, Abhimanyu's wife, and also offer solace to Draupadi, who cherished Abhimanyu as her own son." Agreeing to his devoted friend's plea, Lord Krishna set forth for Upaplavya to offer solace to the grieving relatives.

Arriving in the city of Virata, Lord Krishna entered the palace where Subhadra and the other noble ladies sought solace. Observing his sister's sorrow-stricken state, Krishna began imparting divine wisdom to assuage her pain. He spoke with a voice that carried the weight of eternal truths, "O illustrious lady of the Vrishni lineage, do not be overwhelmed by grief for your son. Every living entity is bound to meet their destined end as decreed by the eternal flow of time. The fate your son encountered was befitting a noble warrior. By vanquishing countless chariot fighters, he has attained the spiritual realm, a place that great yogis reach only through rigorous penance and austere practices. Dispel your sorrow and shed no more tears,

for tomorrow, that wretched King of the Sindhus, who caused your son's demise, shall meet his own end on the battlefield. Arjuna has vowed to bring Jayadratha's life to a close before the sun sets. Have faith and find solace in this knowledge."

Having comforted his grieving sister, Subhadra, Lord Krishna returned to Kurukshetra and entered Arjuna's tent. Arjuna, ever devoted to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, offered his daily worship to the Lord, presenting auspicious articles and seeking to satisfy Him completely. Adorning Krishna's body with scented oils and garlands of fragrant flowers, Arjuna sat beside his dear friend. Krishna, with a reassuring tone, spoke, "Rest now and sleep soundly, for tomorrow marks a great battle. I shall retire to my own tent." Saying this, Lord Krishna departed to rest for the night, accompanied by his charioteer, Daruka.

As the night progressed, Lord Krishna, still awake, engaged in conversation with Daruka. He addressed his loyal charioteer, "O Daruka, Arjuna has vowed to slay Jayadratha before the sun sets tomorrow. Drona will arrange the troops in a manner that renders Jayadratha impervious to attack. It will be no easy feat to vanquish one protected by the likes of Dronacharya. Therefore, if necessary, I shall take the appropriate measures to assist Arjuna in fulfilling his vow. I cannot imagine life on earth without Arjuna. Equipping my chariot with the Kamodaki mace, the Sarnga bow, and my Sudarshana discus, harness my horses—Sugriva, Meghapuspa, Balahaka, and Saivya—and make sure they are adorned in golden armor. When you hear the resounding blast of my Panchajanya conchshell, playing the Rishava note, swiftly come to me. I shall then proceed to slay Jayadratha in the presence of all the Kauravas." Daruka replied faithfully, "Arjuna will undoubtedly emerge victorious tomorrow, for you, my Lord, are his charioteer. I shall carry out your commands and prepare your chariot accordingly."

Chapter 36

Morning of the 14th day of Battle

With the arrival of dawn, the Pandavas roused from their nightly slumber and commenced their morning prayers. Amidst the gathering of assembled kings, Yudhisthira turned to Lord Krishna and spoke with unwavering faith, "O Krishna, it is in You alone that we place our trust for victory and eternal life. You, the compassionate Lord of lords, bear witness to the injustices we have suffered at the hands of these vile sinners. O slayer of Madhu, be our guiding vessel across this vast ocean of the Kauravas. I offer my humble obeisances to You, the eternal Lord, the Supreme Destroyer. O everlasting Vishnu, O Hari, O Vaikunthanatha, Narada has described You as Narayana, the Supreme Lord who wields the Sarnga bow and the Sudarshana chakra. O Lord of all beings, shower Your mercy upon us and ensure that Arjuna does not meet his end in the fiery embrace of the day. May his vow be fulfilled."

To these prayers, Lord Krishna replied with steadfast assurance, "O Yudhisthira, in all the three worlds, there is no archer who can rival Arjuna. He possesses formidable weapons and wields the strength of thousands of warriors. He will trample upon his enemies and surely accomplish his oath. Today, you shall witness that sinful man, Jayadratha, lying lifeless on the plains of Kurukshetra, his soul dispatched to the abode of Yamaraja. Vultures and jackals shall feast upon his carcass. Even if all the demigods were to unite as Jayadratha's protectors, that ruler of the Sindhus shall not survive. Cast aside all anxiety and lamentation."

While Lord Krishna and Yudhisthira conversed, Arjuna arrived in their midst. Rising from his seat, Yudhisthira embraced Arjuna and tenderly smelled his head. He addressed him with

profound affection, "By the radiance of your smiling countenance, it is evident that victory awaits you today. With the blessings of our eternal well-wisher, Lord Krishna, I eagerly await your return here at day's end, having fulfilled your vows."

Arjuna then recounted a vivid dream he had experienced the previous night. He described how Lord Shiva had appeared to him and instructed him in the use of the Pashupatra astra, granting him the fulfillment of his desires. As they listened to this extraordinary tale, all present were struck with wonder and exclaimed, "Excellent! Excellent!" Filled with joyous hearts, they proceeded to the battlefield to make preparations for the day's fateful encounter.

As the night receded and the dawn emerged, Dronacharya organized the massive divisions into three formations. The first formation, known as Sakata, resembled a cart. The second formation was the famed Chakravyuha, while within it lay the Suchimukha formation, akin to the point of a needle, where Jayadratha found shelter behind a multitude of soldiers and maharathis. The breadth of the front line spanned a staggering forty-eight miles, tapering to a width of twenty miles toward the rear of the formations. From the battle's foremost front line to Jayadratha's position, a distance of twelve miles stretched.

Having arranged the troops according to his design, Dronacharya approached Jayadratha and delivered words of encouragement, "O ruler of the Sindhus, let no fear dwell within your heart. I have aligned our formidable divisions in a manner that not even the demigods can breach. Bhurishrava, Karna, Ashvatthama, Salya, Vrishasena, and Kripa shall stand near you as protectors. Before you, like a needle, a hundred thousand horsemen, sixty thousand chariot warriors, forty thousand elephants, and one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers shall form an impenetrable barrier. From the front line to your point of safety, twelve miles shall separate you. Fear not, for Arjuna shall not prevail. If the heavenly gods led by Indra

cannot pierce this formation, what chance do the mortal Pandavas have?"

Assuaging Jayadratha thus, Dronacharya assumed his position at the entrance of the Chakravyuha. Within the Chakravyuha, the Suchimukha formation stood steadfast. Kritavarman occupied the point of the needle array, with the ruler of the Kambhojas and Jalasandha by his side. Duryodhana and Karna stood next, followed by Durmarshana at the forefront of the battle line, and Duhshasana and Vikarna behind. Witnessing the formidable formation orchestrated by the preceptor Dronacharya, the celestial denizens and sages marveled in awe. The army rejoiced at the thought that Arjuna would be consumed by the fires of this day's end, resounding drums and echoing conches filling the air with jubilation.

As the colossal battle array unfolded before their eyes, teeming with millions of warriors whose shouts reverberated like crashing waves, and resonating with the thunderous beat of drums that filled the air, Krishna turned to Arjuna within the chariot and posed a question, his gaze penetrating, "Arjuna, you have undertaken a great vow. This task you have set for yourself is undeniably arduous. Do you truly believe you can accomplish it?"

Arjuna met Krishna's gaze unwaveringly and replied, his voice brimming with determination, "With you as my charioteer and guide, I harbor no doubts whatsoever. I am fully confident that together, we can conquer any challenge that lies before us."

(It is worth noting that for a warrior like Arjuna, the prospect of doubt was akin to a gauntlet thrown down, a challenge that fueled the fire within him. Such challenges spurred individuals with a warrior's mentality to achieve greatness and prove skeptics wrong, rather than becoming disheartened. Krishna, aware of the innermost desires and nature of all beings, knew precisely what needed to be said and done to propel them forward. He engaged with people personally and individually,

providing the necessary guidance in every circumstance. The wise among us would do well to learn from his example.)

Standing resolute at the forefront of the Pandava divisions was Dhananjaya, whose sole desire was to vanquish Jayadratha. He blew his conch, the Devadatta, while the Supreme Personality of Godhead sounded His own, the Panchajanya. Hanuman, the son of the wind god, adorned the banner and let forth a mighty roar. His resonant voice mingled with the resounding conches of Nara and Narayana, striking fear into the hearts of the Kaurava troops. Their spirits quivered, their hair stood on end. Elephants and horses released their waste simultaneously, and the infantry trembled in terror. Some lost their strength, while others were driven to the brink of madness.

Arjuna, the wielder of the Gandiva bow, then beseeched Hrishikesha in these words, "O Krishna, guide the horses toward Durmashana's division. I shall pierce through this Sakata formation at that point and make my way towards Jayadratha."

Thus commanded by Arjuna, Lord Keshava urged the horses forward, leading them to the location where Duryodhana's brother unleashed his mighty arsenal. Arjuna unleashed a torrent of arrows akin to a deluge, initiating a merciless slaughter of the Kaurava army. He severed the heads of numerous renowned chariot warriors, and the sound of those severed heads hitting the ground echoed like ripe fruits falling from a tree shaken by an elephant. Soon, the battlefield turned into a macabre scene of headless corpses, lifeless horses, and fallen elephants. Fueled by the fury ignited by his son's demise, Arjuna laid waste to the enemy soldiers, slaying them by the tens of thousands. With his celestial weapons, he carved a path of devastation, before which no one could stand, and none dared approach. He forged a trail through the enemy ranks, hundreds of yards wide, cutting down elephants with his arrows, causing ten thousand of those colossal beasts to collapse, lifeless upon the earth. The division led by Durmashana crumbled under the assault of Arjuna's arrows, and its soldiers scattered, fleeing for their lives.

Terrified elephants, gripped by fear, trampled foot soldiers underfoot as they retreated.

Next in line to confront Arjuna was Duhshasana, accompanied by a vast multitude of enraged elephants. They charged toward Arjuna with alarming speed, seemingly capable of devouring the entire earth. Swiftly advancing to meet them, Arjuna unleashed his powerful shafts upon the elephant army. Heads began to topple from the warriors mounted on those behemoths, their lives extinguished by Arjuna's arrows. Sometimes, a single arrow pierced through two or three men riding upon the same elephant, joining them in their descent to the ground. Elephants roamed the battlefield with limbless bodies and decapitated riders hanging from their sides. Blood and flesh flowed from the maimed elephants and severed soldiers, creating a ghastly spectacle that few could bear witness to. Duhshasana proved incapable of repelling the relentless onslaught of Arjuna's formidable weaponry. Within a brief span of time, thousands upon thousands of elephants lay strewn across the battlefield, resembling colossal obstacles in an intricate labyrinth. Some were pierced by a single arrow, while others suffered the onslaught of thousands. Some had their heads severed, others had their skulls split open, spilling forth flesh and blood. Some lay completely bisected, devoid of life, while others writhed on the ground in agony, only partially felled. In their retreat, the elephants trampled foot soldiers and horsemen, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. The entire battlefield became a nightmarish tableau as Phalguna thoroughly routed the formidable division of elephants. The remnants of that army sought Drona's protection as they fled from the battlefield.

Sanjaya continued: Witnessing Srutayudha's demise, the Kaurava troops were struck with terror, their morale shattered. Meanwhile, Arjuna, accompanied by Yudhamanyu and

Uttamaujas, pressed forward, relentlessly carving a path through the enemy ranks. They were like lions amidst a flock of sheep, their prowess unmatched and their determination unwavering.

As they advanced, Arjuna encountered the mighty warrior Sudakshina, the ruler of the Kambhojas. Sudakshina, recognizing Arjuna's approach, unleashed a volley of ten arrows towards him. Arjuna, undeterred, swiftly countered with a hundred arrows, piercing Sudakshina's armor and striking his chest with nine arrows. The impact was so powerful that Sudakshina's bow shattered, leaving him defenseless.

Krishna, who was well aware of the urgency of their mission, urged Arjuna to swiftly dispatch Sudakshina without any mercy, despite their familial connection. Arjuna, heeding Krishna's advice, unleashed a long arrow that found its mark in Sudakshina's chest, causing him to collapse in his chariot. Before Sudakshina could regain his composure, Arjuna had already surged ahead, penetrating deeper into the Kaurava army.

Now engaged in battle with Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, Kritavarman, another formidable warrior, shattered their bows and unleashed his own onslaught. However, the Pandava warriors, undeterred, quickly procured stronger bows and continued their pursuit of Arjuna's path. Kritavarman's attempts to impede their progress proved fruitless as the two warriors fought valiantly, determined to follow Arjuna's lead.

While this was transpiring, Srutayudha, the son of Varuna and Parnasa, who had received an invincible mace from his father, approached Lord Krishna and Arjuna with hostile intent. Disregarding his father's instructions, Srutayudha hurled the mace at Krishna. However, the divine intervention protected Krishna, as the mace rebounded and struck Srutayudha, leading to his own demise. Witnessing the fate of Srutayudha, the troops supporting him were overwhelmed with fear and scattered in disarray.

As chaos enveloped the Kaurava ranks, Arjuna and his companions pressed onward, their determination unyielding. They continued their relentless assault, carving a path of destruction through the enemy forces, leaving a trail of fallen warriors, shattered chariots, and trampled bodies in their wake. The Pandava warriors were an unstoppable force, their valor and skill unparalleled on the battlefield.

Sanjaya continued to narrate the events to Dhritarashtra, providing a vivid account of the relentless advance of Arjuna and the Pandava army, instilling both awe and trepidation in the hearts of the listeners.

Sanjaya continued: The battle raged on, with Arjuna facing formidable opponents one after another. Sudakshina, the ruler of the Kambhojas, approached with his akshauhini division, ready to challenge Arjuna. Sudakshina, known for his prowess and undefeated record, launched a barrage of arrows, striking Arjuna and Lord Krishna. In retaliation, Arjuna released seven arrows that pierced Sudakshina, causing him to collapse as the arrows embedded themselves into the ground.

Enraged by the attack, Sudakshina retaliated, piercing Arjuna with ten arrows to his chest. Determined to avenge the assault, Arjuna swiftly cut Sudakshina's bow and standard. Undeterred, Sudakshina picked up a jewel and gold-covered iron dart, aiming it at Arjuna. With great force, he released the dart, which pierced through Arjuna's armor and left him in a swoon, sitting down on his chariot.

Fueled by rage, Arjuna resolved to end Sudakshina's life. Releasing a barrage of arrows, he shattered Sudakshina's chariot and slew his horses. Finally, Arjuna unleashed a single golden shafted arrow that struck Sudakshina in the chest, piercing his armor and claiming his life. With the death of their leader, the troops supporting Sudakshina fled in fear.

The next warriors to confront Arjuna were Shrutayus and Achutayus. Rushing towards Arjuna, Shrutayus hurled a javelin that pierced Arjuna's armor, causing him to fall into a deadly swoon. Simultaneously, Achutayus also struck Arjuna forcefully with a javelin. Pierced by both javelins, Arjuna managed to support himself by grasping his flagstaff. The troops supporting Shrutayus and Achutayus rejoiced, believing that Arjuna had been slain. Encouraged by their apparent victory, these warriors showered arrows upon Krishna and Arjuna.

Regaining his senses, Arjuna pulled out both javelins and witnessed an onslaught of thousands of arrows directed towards him. In response, he invoked the Sakra weapon, unleashing an arrow that multiplied into tens of thousands. The arrows pierced Shrutayus, Achutayus, and their supporting troops, resulting in their loss of limbs, arms, heads, and lives. The scene was one of ghastly devastation as the battlefield was littered with the fallen soldiers.

Breaking through the Kaurava ranks, Arjuna continued his relentless pursuit of Jayadratha. Despite a solid mass of soldiers blocking his path, Arjuna employed the Vayavaya weapon, blowing away the troops like the wind scatters leaves. Elephants, chariots, horses, and infantry were tossed into the air, landing a great distance away.

In the midst of his advance, Arjuna encountered Srutayus, the king of the Amvashthas, who stood in his way. Arjuna swiftly killed Srutayus' horses and shattered his bow, eliminating his means of defense. Srutayus then wielded a mace and descended from his chariot, running towards Krishna and Arjuna with the intent to halt their progress. He struck Lord Krishna on the head, but the divine Krishna remained unperturbed. Arjuna responded by severing the mace in two with his arrows.

Unyielding, Srutayus grabbed another mace from the ground and attacked Arjuna with all his might. However, before Srutayus could strike again, Arjuna swiftly cut off his arms with

two broad-headed arrows. Finally, with another arrow, Arjuna severed Srutayus' head adorned with a crown and shimmering earrings. Srutayus, a great warrior, met his demise, and his supporting troops fled in fear.

The epic battle continued to unfold, with Arjuna displaying his unmatched skill and valor as he pressed onward towards his ultimate objective.

Chapter 37

Arjuna Continues His Path of Destruction

Dhritarastra inquired with anticipation, "Tell me, Sanjaya, what did the mighty warrior Arjuna do after slaying the ruler of the Kambhojas, Sudakshina? I am eager to know if he managed to reach Jayadratha, the King of Sindhu, whom he sought to kill."

Sanjaya, with a voice resonating like a seasoned storyteller, responded, "O King, after Arjuna had vanquished Sudakshina, your son Duryodhana approached the revered preceptor Drona, fueled by desperation and a desire to extinguish the forest fire of Arjuna. He spoke with a mixture of flattery and accusation, claiming that Drona, the embodiment of wisdom, had failed to fulfill his promise to protect Jayadratha. Duryodhana even questioned Drona's allegiance, likening him to a double-edged razor dipped in honey. His words pierced the heart of the noble preceptor, but Drona, ever composed, responded with wisdom."

Drona, stung by Duryodhana's words, replied, "O child, I understand your concerns, but do not misunderstand my intentions. You are as dear to me as my own son, Ashvatthama. However, circumstances have changed. I am unable to keep up with Arjuna's speed and skill. The Pandava divisions have breached our frontline, and Yudhisthira is advancing. My plan now is to capture the great King Yudhisthira. As for you, my brave and equal counterpart, you can face Arjuna in battle. You both belong to the same dynasty, are of similar age, and possess equal prowess. You are a mighty ruler, and by challenging Arjuna yourself, you can achieve everlasting fame."

Duryodhana expressed his doubts, acknowledging the invincibility of Arjuna, who had already defeated both Kritavarman and Drona himself. He confessed his dependency on Drona's protection and pleaded for the preservation of his reputation.

Drona reassured him, "Arjuna is undoubtedly formidable, but today the world shall witness your prowess against him. I have an impenetrable golden armor that will shield you from his weapons. I will fasten it to your body with Vedic mantras,

ensuring your full protection. With this armor, you need not fear Arjuna's wrath. Go forth with confidence and face him on the battlefield."

With blessings from Drona, Duryodhana, swelling with pride, marched towards Arjuna, who was engaged in a fierce battle with the Kaurava forces. Drona, on the other hand, confronted the Pandava army, engaging in a fierce duel with Dhristadyumna. Their chariots clashed, and their horses became entangled. Dhristadyumna, wielding a sword and shield, descended from his chariot and advanced towards Drona. However, Drona skillfully shattered Dhristadyumna's weapons with his arrows. Before Drona could strike a fatal blow, Satyaki intervened, cutting to pieces the arrow capable of killing Dhristadyumna. Drona then took Dhristadyumna on his chariot and moved to another part of the battlefield, leaving the fiery clash behind.

Meanwhile, Arjuna, with relentless determination, made his way towards Jayadratha, leaving behind a trail of carnage in his wake. His arrows were released with such precision that by the time they reached their target, Krishna and Arjuna had already arrived at the scene. Arjuna's celestial horses, as white as the milk ocean, raced with the speed of the wind, propelled by Arjuna's unwavering will. They penetrated deep into the Kaurava ranks, but the exertion took its toll, and the horses struggled to maintain their pace, gasping for breath amidst the chaos of the battlefield.

In the pulsating battleground, the exhausted horses of Krishna and Arjuna became targets for the Kings of Avantipura, Vinda, and Anuvinda. These fearless warriors showered Arjuna with sixty-four arrows and Krishna with seventy, their intent clear—to exploit the weariness of the valiant duo. They then unleashed a barrage of a hundred arrows upon Arjuna's weary steeds. Filled with a sense of triumph, they roared in victory and

launched another fierce attack. But Arjuna, a beacon of intolerance for their foolishness, swiftly severed their bows as they closed in. Undeterred, Vinda and Anuvinda brandished stronger bows, unleashing deadly arrows with unyielding determination.

Yet, Arjuna, cool and collected, deflected their arrows with ease, slicing through their bows once again. He swiftly put an end to their horses and chariot drivers, silencing the supporting soldiers of these two formidable kings. Vinda and Anuvinda, driven by a deep-seated grudge against Lord Krishna due to their sister's abduction, had brought a formidable army to fight against the Pandavas. However, Arjuna, showing no regard for their family ties, ended Vinda's life with an arrow as sharp as a razor. Witnessing his elder brother's demise, Anuvinda, fueled by rage, grabbed a mace and charged towards Lord Krishna and Arjuna's chariot. With a mighty swing, he struck Krishna's head with all his might, but the resolute Lord Krishna stood firm like an immovable mountain.

In response, Arjuna drew six arrows from his quiver, severing the arms and legs of the valiant Anuvinda. As he fell, Arjuna delivered the final blow, decapitating him with a crescent-shaped arrow. The sight of Vinda and Anuvinda slain enraged a massive force of elephants, chariot fighters, and horsemen, who rushed towards Arjuna. However, displaying unmatched prowess, Arjuna effortlessly dispatched each warrior, sending them to the abode of Yamaraja, the Lord of Death.

Amidst the chaos, Arjuna turned to Hrishikesha, Lord Krishna, seeking guidance. With a calm and composed demeanor, Arjuna spoke, "O Krishna, the Sindhu King remains distant, and our horses are exhausted. What is the best course of action, O embodiment of wisdom? You are the guiding light for the Pandavas, their eyes and ears. Please enlighten us in these trying times."

Lord Krishna replied, "I shall unbridle the horses and tend to their needs. They require water and rest."

Arjuna declared, "O Hrishikesha, I will hold back the entire enemy army with my formidable arsenal. Do what is necessary to ensure our horses regain their full strength."

Sanjaya continued his narrative to Dhritarastra, describing how Arjuna descended from the chariot, standing fearlessly with his mighty Gandiva bow in hand. Sensing an opportune moment, thousands of chariot fighters surged towards him, their assault akin to the relentless onslaught of the ocean against the shore. However, Arjuna skillfully repelled their attacks with his unerring arrows. Meanwhile, Lord Krishna alerted Arjuna to the absence of a well from which the horses could drink and rejuvenate.

Understanding Krishna's intentions, Arjuna swiftly released an arrow into the ground, causing a miraculous lake to spring forth amidst the battlefield. It teemed with vibrant fish, enchanting lotus flowers, and graceful birds, captivating the heavenly denizens who marveled at the sight. Even the revered sage Narada appeared to witness this extraordinary creation—an oasis amidst the war-torn chaos. Undeterred by the ongoing conflict, Arjuna fashioned a protective shelter with his arrows, allowing the horses to drink from the lake in safety. Witnessing this spectacle, Lord Krishna exclaimed, "Excellent! Excellent!"

With utmost care, Vasudeva, Krishna, unyoked the horses, leading them to the arrow-made shelter. Tenderly, Lord Krishna tended to their wounds, using his transcendental touch to alleviate their fatigue and pain. The horses drank to their heart's content, rejuvenated by the life-giving waters. All this transpired amid the ferocity of battle. Krishna, embodying serenity amidst an assembly of women, calmly returned the horses to the chariot, skillfully securing them in their rightful positions. To those fortunate enough to witness this remarkable display, it appeared nothing short of a divine wonder.

With the horses once again harnessed, Lord Krishna and Arjuna pressed forward into the heart of the Kaurava army. Penetrating the ranks of Drona and Kritavarman, Arjuna drew closer to the location where Jayadratha, the Sindhu King, sought shelter. The stage was set for the decisive clash that would shape the destiny of the battlefield.

The battlefield pulsed with the intensity of a high-stakes showdown. Duryodhana, consumed by his thirst for revenge, finally caught up with Krishna and Arjuna's chariot. The time for reckoning had arrived, and Krishna wasted no time in instructing Arjuna on the course of action.

"Arjuna, my friend," Krishna spoke with a voice like thunder, "This is the moment we've been waiting for. Duryodhana, the sinful scoundrel who has wronged your brothers and your wife, stands before us. It's time to make him pay for his treachery. Remember his offenses, the exile he forced upon you, and seize this opportunity to send him straight to Yamaraja's court."

As Duryodhana charged towards them, the Kaurava army, sensing victory, rallied around their king, eager to witness the downfall of Krishna and Arjuna. But Duryodhana, ever the showman, bolstered their spirits, assuring them of his imminent triumph. "Fear not, my loyal soldiers! Today, I shall send Krishna and Arjuna to the embrace of death. They will meet their demise at my hands!"

With the stage set for an epic clash, Duryodhana struck first, raining arrows upon Arjuna—three piercing his valiant opponent, ten aimed at Krishna, and another sixteen targeting their horses. He even managed to sever Krishna's whip, thinking he had dealt a significant blow. But Arjuna, not one to be outdone, unleashed his own volley of arrows, releasing fourteen in Duryodhana's direction. However, the Kaurava's impenetrable armor repelled them effortlessly. Unfazed, Arjuna launched

another twenty-nine arrows, only to meet the same frustrating outcome.

Arjuna, observant and quick-witted, turned to Krishna and discerned the origin of Duryodhana's formidable armor. "Krishna, that armor he wears—it must be Drona's doing. Only the great Drona knows how to apply it, and I have learned it from him. But Duryodhana lacks the knowledge of how to utilize its full potential. He wears it like a mere ornament. Witness now, Krishna, the strength of my arms and bow as I crush this fool!"

Fueled by anger and determination, Arjuna invoked a celestial weapon capable of breaching Duryodhana's celestial armor. But before he could release it, Ashvatthama intervened, cutting the weapon from the Gandiva bowstring. Arjuna realized the danger—a second invocation of that weapon would not only slay his enemies but also his own troops. Undeterred, Arjuna pressed on, relentlessly targeting Duryodhana. He killed the king's four horses and charioteer, followed by the supporting troops that shielded him.

With a fierce determination, Arjuna stretched his bow to its limits, obliterating Duryodhana's royal chariot into fragments and piercing his palms with numerous arrows. The Kaurava troops, witnessing their king's desperate situation, rushed at Arjuna in a massive wave. But Krishna and Arjuna, standing strong together, struck down every attacker that dared to approach them.

Meanwhile, Drona, true to his promise, sought to capture Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas. The clash between the two was nothing short of cataclysmic. Drona shattered Yudhisthira's bow, while Yudhisthira retaliated by cutting off Drona's bow in return. The battle escalated, with Drona killing Yudhisthira's horses and charioteer. However, Yudhisthira, resourceful as ever, was whisked away from the battlefield by Sahadeva, escaping Drona's clutches.

Amidst the chaos, individual battles raged on. King Brihatkshatra engaged in a deadly duel with Kshemadhruti, beheading him with a skillful strike. Dhrishtaketu, another valiant warrior, clashed with Prince Viradhanwan, piercing his armor with a powerful dart and ending his life. Sahadeva fought fiercely against Durmuka, the son of Dhritarastra, ultimately claiming victory by slaying Durmuka's horses and charioteer. Satyaki, in his own battlefield glory, engaged in combat with Vyaghradatta, a prince from Trigarta. Satyaki's arrow pierced Vyaghradatta's golden armor, sealing his fate and paving the way for Satyaki's ruthless assault on the Trigarta ranks.

Even the sons of Draupadi, driven by their loyalty and determination, joined the fray. With the combined might of the Pandava lineage, they unleashed havoc upon the son of Somadatta. The son of Arjuna targeted his horses, the son of Bhima severed his bow, the son of Yudhisthira brought down his standard, and the son of Nakula struck down his charioteer. Finally, the son of Sahadeva delivered the coup de grâce, decapitating the enemy prince with a razor-faced arrow.

As the battlefield erupted with the fall of these formidable warriors, the Kaurava army crumbled. Fear gripped their hearts, and they scattered in every direction, knowing that their end was near. The tides had turned in favor of Krishna, Arjuna, and the righteous cause they championed. The pulsating rhythm of battle had reached its climax, leaving a trail of destruction and paving the way for the inevitable victory of righteousness over evil.

Chapter 38

Satyaki goes to help Arjuna

The battlefield trembled with the clash of titans, and Drona, seething with anger, charged at Satyaki like a raging storm. A battle of epic proportions unfolded between these two chariot warriors, as Drona began to overpower Satyaki, threatening to swallow him in the vast ocean of his prowess. Yudhisthira, perceiving the danger, wasted no time in summoning Dhristadyumna to aid the valiant hero of the Vrishni lineage.

"O Dhristadyumna," Yudhisthira beseeched, "Dronacharya is bearing down upon Satyaki with relentless force. He toys with him like a child with his playthings. Gather all the Pandava warriors, led by Bhima, and fight against the preceptor. Save Satyaki from the jaws of death!"

As the Pandava forces engaged Drona, Yudhisthira anxiously listened for the sound of Arjuna's mighty Gandiva bow. Yet, amidst the clamor of the Kaurava army, the absence of the Gandiva's resonance troubled the noble king. Thoughts raced through his mind, "Something is amiss. The Kauravas roar with fervor, but where is the sound of the Gandiva?"

Deep in contemplation, Yudhisthira devised a plan. He turned to Satyaki, the grandson of Sini, and entrusted him with a weighty responsibility. "O descendant of Vrishni, we must alleviate our distress. I place upon you a great burden. Arjuna, your friend and mentor, may be facing grave peril. Alone, he has breached Drona's formidable divisions and now sets his sights on Jayadratha. I hear the resounding shouts of the Kauravas as they clash with Arjuna. But the silence of the Gandiva troubles me. Though I have faith that Lord Krishna is with him, I desire to ensure Arjuna's protection. I cannot bear to see him engulfed by the Kaurava sea. Among the chariot fighters of the Vrishni clan, two possess unmatched skill—Pradyumna and yourself. Therefore, I implore you to enter the vast Kaurava army and aid Arjuna in his quest. I know you were appointed to protect me from Drona, but there are other capable warriors here, such as Bhima and Dhristadyumna, who can safeguard me. I command

you to plunge into the tumultuous sea of the Kaurava ranks and achieve everlasting glory."

Moved by Yudhisthira's words, Satyaki responded with unwavering determination, "O mighty warrior, your words befit a great king concerned for those under his care. As for me, I am ready to lay down my life for the sake of Dhananjaya. The force of the Kauravas holds no fear for me. I am prepared to fight all the demigods and asuras combined. I vow to you that I will reach Arjuna unscathed and return safely. However, Arjuna specifically commanded me to protect you from Drona. Without leaving you in the hands of a capable guardian, how can I fulfill your request and follow Arjuna?"

Yudhisthira reassured Satyaki, saying, "O mighty warrior, I believe Bhima will provide me protection in your absence. Dhristadyumna, born from the sacrificial fire destined to slay Drona, is also here. Many others, like the five sons of Draupadi, Virata, Drupada, Shikhandin, Ghatotkacha, Dhristaketu, and my own brothers Nakula and Sahadeva, stand ready to defend me against the onslaught of the Kauravas. They will protect me like the steadfast beech withstands the furious sea. Therefore, go, O grandson of Sini, with a light heart, free from worry, and aid Arjuna in his mission to vanquish Jayadratha."

Empowered by Yudhisthira's command, Satyaki prepared himself for the arduous task ahead. His horses were fed, watered, and meticulously cared for. His arrows were sharpened, and his chariot adorned with resplendent golden armor and chains. All this was meticulously arranged by Daruka's younger brother, an expert horse handler in battle. Satyaki's chariot was filled with an abundance of weapons, capable of carving a path to Arjuna's side. Bows of various kinds and thousands of arrows adorned his chariot, along with celestial weapons at his disposal. Satyaki paid homage to the Brahmins, bestowed valuable gifts in charity, and sought the blessings of the King's lotus feet. With reverence, he mounted his chariot and advanced toward the Kaurava host, shining like the morning sun dispelling the fog. Yudhisthira,

surrounded by his forces, followed Satyaki, ready to lend his support in penetrating the formidable array of the Kauravas.

As Satyaki faced the formidable preceptor Drona, a furious clash erupted, each warrior displaying incredible skill and raining down a barrage of arrows upon the other. Neither could gain the upper hand in this fierce contest of champions. Amidst the heat of battle, Drona taunted Satyaki, "Your teacher, like a craven, evaded me when I challenged him. O scion of the Vrishni lineage, if you dare to stand before me, you shall not escape with your life."

Undeterred, Satyaki responded firmly, "By the command of King Yudhisthira, I follow the path set by my mentor. Great Brahmana, it would be a waste of time to engage in combat with you. A disciple must adhere to the example set by his martial guru."

Having spoken these words, the grandson of Sini skillfully maneuvered, evading Drona's pursuit. Satyaki then directed his charioteer, "Listen closely to my orders and proceed with caution. Just ahead lies the Avanti division, flanked by the Southern forces. Beyond them are the Balhikas, and farther still lies Karna's division. These formidable divisions provide mutual support. Take me to the point where the Southerners and Balhikas are arrayed, leaving an open space to the left. Guide the horses toward that spot, for there I shall pierce through this Chakravyuha formation."

While Satyaki advanced toward the Kaurava army, Drona relentlessly pursued him, unleashing a storm of deadly arrows. As Satyaki reached the intended point of penetration, the Kaurava soldiers broke ranks and fled in fear. Observing this, Kritavarman stepped forward to confront Satyaki. However, the grandson of Sini swiftly dispatched Kritavarman's four horses and pierced him with a volley of arrows. Enraged by the assault, Kritavarman retaliated, his arrow piercing Satyaki's body and vanishing into the earth. He then shattered Satyaki's bow and

arrows with a powerful strike. Unfazed, Satyaki swiftly slew Kritavarman's charioteer and showered him with a hail of arrows. Undeterred by defeat, Kritavarman mounted another chariot, but before he could engage, Satyaki disappeared from sight, leaving Kritavarman seething with frustration. Drona stationed him at the entrance of the formidable formation and personally took up the challenge against Satyaki.

Meanwhile, Bhima and the other Pandavas descended upon Kritavarman's forces. Fueled by his defeat at the hands of Satyaki, Kritavarman fought with otherworldly strength, piercing Bhima with a barrage of arrows, causing him to falter and collapse upon his chariot. To shield their fallen brother, Nakula, Sahadeva, and the others unleashed a relentless volley of arrows upon Kritavarman. Bhima regained his senses, grasping a javelin and hurling it with all his might. Yet, before it could reach its target, Kritavarman shattered it to pieces. Faced with fierce opposition, Kritavarman battled the Pandava generals, with Shikhandin, the sons of Draupadi, and Dhristadyumna joining the fray. Shikhandin launched a powerful strike, shattering Kritavarman's bow and arrows. Swiftly retrieving another bow, Kritavarman unleashed a barrage that overwhelmed his opponents. Shikhandin tumbled from his chariot, and his charioteer swiftly carried him to safety to preserve his life. Bhima and the Pandavas pressed forward to confront Kritavarman, but the son of Hridika held them at bay.

Amidst the resounding tumult echoing from behind, Satyaki, alerted to the fierce uproar, commanded his charioteer to turn back. Swiftly, he charged toward Kritavarman, dispatching his four horses and charioteer, shattering his bow, and piercing him with countless arrows. Having conquered his adversary in battle, Satyaki pressed on his path. He then encountered Drona's divisions. Satyaki spoke to his charioteer, "Behold, O Suta, the vast formations led by Drona. Rukmaratha, the valiant chariot warrior, commands this force, bolstered by mighty elephants and numerous chariots. The Trigartas also reside within this

formidable division. Head in that direction, for there, in the presence of the preceptor, I shall subdue them."

Satyaki, known as Yuyudhana, charged boldly into the divisions led by Drona, where mighty elephants loomed large. There, he was confronted by the formidable Jalasandha, the ruler of Magadha. Swift as lightning, Jalasandha severed Satyaki's bow and rained arrows upon him. But Satyaki, undeterred, grasped a sturdier bow, returning the assault by piercing Jalasandha's flesh and shattering his own bow. Jalasandha, undaunted, hurled a lance with all his might, tearing through Satyaki's arm and burying itself in the earth. Yet, Satyaki, unaffected by the king's javelin, unleashed another volley, letting forth a mighty roar. In response, Jalasandha brandished a massive scimitar, hurling it with relentless force at Satyaki. The blade rent asunder Satyaki's bow and arrows, descending to the earth like a fiery halo. Unfazed and grinning, Satyaki seized another bow, dispatching a pair of razor-faced arrows that severed the Magadha king's arms. Those severed limbs tumbled on either side of the elephant, while the monarch still drew breath. With a third arrow, Satyaki beheaded Jalasandha, silencing his foe forever. With the fall of the Magadha king, Satyaki pierced the colossal elephant on which the monarch had ridden. Enraged, the beast bolted in the opposite direction, trampling chariots, horses, and infantry by the hundreds. Having dispatched Jalasandha, Satyaki continued his relentless march toward Arjuna.

Soon, Satyaki encountered Duryodhana, who proved to be an easy target. Satyaki swiftly annihilated his horses, charioteer, and shattered his chariot. Faced with the impossibility of confronting Satyaki, Duryodhana fled like a craven. Yet, Kritavarman, ever eager to engage the grandson of Sini, met a similar fate, falling defeated in his attempt. Satyaki, burning with a fervent desire to reunite with Arjuna, pierced Kritavarman's armor with a volley of arrows, causing him to swoon and be carried away from the battlefield.

Drona, persistently pursuing Satyaki from behind, finally caught up to him, unleashing a relentless barrage of arrows. A duel of epic proportions ensued, leaving the Kaurava soldiers in awe. Ultimately, Satyaki dispatched Drona's charioteer, causing the preceptor's horse to run amok across the battlefield. Seizing the opportunity, Satyaki pressed forward through the Kaurava ranks, driven by an unwavering determination to find his martial guru.

Satyaki then crossed paths with Sudarshana, a valiant king who sought to impede his progress. Sudarshana showered him with a hail of arrows, letting loose a mighty roar. Swift as a striking serpent, Satyaki retaliated, his arrows swiftly claiming the lives of Sudarshana's horses. With a long-shafted arrow, he severed the king's head, bringing an abrupt end to his resistance.

Like a blazing meteor, the grandson of Sini surged through the Kaurava host, felling prominent division leaders. In response to Duryodhana's command, a thousand chariot warriors, a hundred rathas, two thousand elephants, and countless foot soldiers rushed at Satyaki, intent on ending his life. Yet, witnessing their approach, Satyaki consigned them all to the realm of Yamaraja. Not a single warrior escaped his deadly prowess. Infuriated by the utter defeat of their formidable force, Duhshasana commanded mountaineers to engage Satyaki in combat. These mountaineers were skilled in hurling colossal boulders at their foes, some as large as elephant heads. They charged at Satyaki, propelling their boulders with deadly force. But the grandson of Sini, with his celestial weapons, shattered the rocks into fragments, illuminating the sky like meteors that rained down upon the mountaineers, sowing havoc and claiming numerous lives. Their agonized shrieks filled the air as they plummeted to the ground.

Observing Duhshasana's reluctance to confront Satyaki, Drona's voice cut through the air, harsh and biting, "Why, O Duhshasana, do these chariot fighters flee from battle? Why do you hesitate to fight? Have you forgotten the gambling match where you sought to strip the beautiful Draupadi of her dignity? You, who

were the cause of this great war, now flee the battlefield like a craven? Where is your pride now? Where is your boastful tongue? These warriors flee because you fear to face the enemy. This is but a single warrior, while there are many here. What will you do when you come face to face with the wielder of the Gandiva bow? Satyaki's arrows are no match for the potent shafts of Phalguna. Before the Pandavas annihilate all your brothers in battle, seek peace with them. Bhishma warned you long ago that the Pandavas were invincible in combat, but your foolish brother refused to listen. Therefore, steel yourself for battle. Hasten and engage the enemy before he decimates our entire army."

Sanjaya, in his narrative to Dhritarashtra, revealed the unfolding events on the battlefield. He spoke of how your son, chastised by Drona, my lord, did not retort but instead proceeded into battle with Satyaki, pretending not to hear the words of the preceptor.

Dronacharya, then, plunged into the midst of the Panchalas, the Somakas, and the Shrinjayas, engaging them in fierce combat. There, he encountered a son of Drupada, Viraketu by name. A formidable clash erupted between these two renowned warriors, captivating the attention of all present on the battlefield. Yet, in the end, Drona unleashed a celestial weapon, resembling a blazing fire, which he hurled with the swiftness of a falling meteor. Piercing the noble prince of Panchala, it snuffed out his life, leaving him bereft of breath. Upon witnessing this, four of Viraketu's brothers rushed forward to avenge his death. But Drona, with ease, subdued them and decapitated them like one plucking flowers from a tree.

Dhristadyumna, unable to bear the loss of his stepbrothers, rushed toward Drona, raining a multitude of arrows upon him. Pierced deeply, Drona fell into a swoon on the floor of his chariot. Seizing the opportunity, Dhristadyumna descended from his own chariot, sword in hand, and hastened toward Drona, intent on severing his head. Yet, as Dhristadyumna approached,

Drona regained consciousness and, taking up his bow, unleashed a volley of arrows at him from close range. Weakened by the onslaught, Dhristadyumna retreated to his chariot to engage Drona in combat. Ultimately, Drona slew his charioteer, leaving the horses without a driver, and they ran recklessly across the battlefield.

Sanjaya continued to recount the events of the battle to the blind King Dhritarashtra. He spoke, "O King, your son Duhshasana then launched a fierce assault on Satyaki, seeking to end his life. He was surrounded by five hundred mighty chariot warriors, who showered hundreds of arrows upon Satyaki's chariot. Yet, in a short span of time, Satyaki dispatched every heroic fighter who supported Duhshasana. Enraged, Duhshasana struck Satyaki with nine arrows, followed by three more. But Satyaki retaliated by slaying your son's charioteer and horses. He then destroyed the wheels of his chariot and killed the soldiers guarding them. In desperation, Duhshasana leapt onto the chariot of the King of the Trigartas and fled from the battlefield. Satyaki, mindful of Bhima's oath, did not pursue him with the intent to kill."

Sanjaya went on, "In the afternoon of that day, O King, a dreadful battle ensued between Drona and the foremost Pandava heroes. The five Kekaya brothers, led by Vrihatkshatra, confronted the preceptor Drona. Drona aimed fifteen arrows at the Kekaya prince, but Vrihatkshatra shattered them with his own arrows. Undeterred, Drona invoked the Brahma weapon, which surged forth from his bow like lightning. However, Vrihatkshatra countered with his own Brahma weapon, bewildering Drona's assault. Stretching his bow to its full extent, Dronacharya pierced Vrihatkshatra's armor. Furious, the prince of Kekaya retaliated by showering Drona with numerous shafts. He even struck down his charioteer. In response, Dronacharya slew Vrihatkshatra's horses, and with a single arrow, pierced his heart, extinguishing his life."

After the demise of Vrihatkshatra, Dhristaketu, the son of Shishupala, stepped forward to confront Dronacharya. Having brought an akshauhini division of soldiers to the Pandava's side, Dhristaketu had previously been enthroned as King following Shishupala's death at the hands of Lord Krishna during the Rajasuya sacrifice. As one of the seven commanders on the Pandava's side, he possessed great prowess as a maharathi. Dhristaketu unleashed a barrage of arrows upon Drona, causing him severe wounds. With flaming arrows, he targeted Drona's horses and charioteer. However, undeterred and wearing a smile, Drona swiftly slew all four horses and severed the head of his charioteer with a single arrow. He then pierced Dhristaketu with twenty-five arrows. The King of the Chedis dismounted from his chariot and hurled a mace at Drona with all his might. Drona countered the attack by striking the mace with hundreds of arrows, creating resounding echoes of their collision across the battlefield. Dhristaketu retaliated by throwing an iron javelin followed by a gold-covered dart. Drona skillfully destroyed the javelin with five arrows and the dart with four. Showing no mercy to his adversary, Drona released a long-shafted arrow that pierced Dhristaketu's chest, causing him to fall to the ground, mortally wounded. With the death of this mighty maharathi, the supporting soldiers scattered and fled in different directions.

Next to engage Dronacharya in battle was Sahadeva, the son of Jarasandha. After Bhima had slain his father, Lord Krishna had anointed Sahadeva as the King of Magadha. Sahadeva, with deep affection for the Pandavas, became a subordinate king under Yudhisthira and brought one akshauhini division consisting of chariot fighters, cavalry, elephant warriors, and infantry to aid the Pandava cause. Sahadeva, a formidable warrior like his father, rushed toward Dronacharya with great fervor, showering him with a barrage of arrows and letting out a mighty roar. However, in the blink of an eye, Drona slew the son of Jarasandha before the eyes of all the bowmen. From that point on, Dronacharya resembled Yamaraja, the god of death himself, as he mercilessly killed all who stood against him. He began to slay thousands of elephants, horses, and men. The

Chedis, Panchalas, Matsyas, and Shrinjayas then rallied together, charging at Drona, proclaiming, "Drona is slain! Drona is slain!" They fought with all their might in an attempt to bring him down.

Ksatradharman, the son of Dhristadyumna, then confronted Dronacharya, unleashing his formidable arsenal of weapons. He swiftly cut off Drona's bow and pierced him in the chest with five arrows. Unfazed by those wounds, Drona picked up another bow and pierced Ksatradharman in the chest with a single arrow, extinguishing his life. The great preceptor, surrounded by a mountain of heads around his chariot, faced the advancing forces of the Panchalas. Drona roamed amidst the Pandava forces, wreaking havoc and causing the annihilation of countless lives. The battlefield resembled a nightmare, as if Drona had been appointed by Yamaraja himself to claim the lives of all living creatures.

Chapter 39

Bhima Endeavors to Find Arjuna

After Satyaki had entered the Chakravyuha, Yudhisthira grew concerned when he could no longer hear the sounds of Satyaki's bow and feared that something calamitous had befallen him. He decided to send Bhima into the Kaurava army to protect Satyaki. Upon finding Bhima engaged in slaughtering the Kaurava troops, Yudhisthira expressed his apprehension, saying, "O Bhima, I cannot see Arjuna's banner, nor do I hear the twang of Gandiva. Fearing for Arjuna's life, I sent Satyaki into the Kaurava ranks. But now I can no longer hear Satyaki's bow or Arjuna's bow. I only hear the sound of Lord Krishna's Panchajanya conchshell. This leads me to believe that Arjuna has been slain, and Krishna is fighting alone against the Kauravas. I am gripped with fear that Yuyudhana (Satyaki) has also met with a similar fate, engulfed in the sea of Kuru warriors led by Drona. Please dispel my fears by going forward and protecting these two heroes who are facing overwhelming odds."

Bhima responded, assuring Yudhisthira, "I do not perceive any danger threatening Krishna and Arjuna. However, out of respect for your command, I will search for the place where these two heroes are releasing their arrows. Once I find them safe, I will return and inform you of their well-being." Bhima then instructed Dhristadyumna to protect the King in his absence and prepared to follow the path taken by Arjuna and Satyaki. He bestowed charity upon the Brahmanas, who blessed him for victory. Equipping his chariot with various weapons, Bhima allowed his horses to rest. He donned a black coat of iron mail adorned with golden designs, resembling a cloud charged with lightning.

As Bhima readied himself to enter the Kaurava army, he heard the resounding blasts of Lord Krishna's Panchajanya conchshell. Upon hearing the mighty sound, Yudhisthira told Bhima, "Undoubtedly, Arjuna is facing difficulties, and Krishna, the wielder of the discus and mace, is engaged in battle with the Kurus. Hurry to the place where Dhananjaya (Arjuna) is fighting."

Following his elder brother's orders, Bhima blew his own conchshell and shouted loudly, creating fear among Duryodhana's troops. He then advanced towards his enemies. His horses moved with the swiftness of the wind, guided by the divine Vishoka. The son of the wind god, Bhima, drew his bow to its maximum extent, wreaking havoc upon the Kaurava's front line with his arrows. He soon confronted Dronacharya and showered him with arrows. Drona, eager to fight Bhima, challenged him with these words, "O Bhimasena, you cannot penetrate the Kaurava army without first defeating me in battle. Krishna and Arjuna have entered this formation with my permission alone, but you will never succeed."

Hearing his preceptor's challenge, Bhima retorted, "O worst of the Brahmanas, I know that Arjuna entered this formidable formation with the speed of his chariot. If he paid you respects while passing through, it was merely to honor you. However, I am not as compassionate as Arjuna. Seeing you as our enemy, I will subjugate you in front of your assembled forces." Saying this, Bhima whirled a mace in the air and hurled it at Dronacharya. In order to save his life, Drona disembarked from his chariot. The forceful mace shattered Drona's chariot and horses before burying itself in the ground. Swiftly, Drona mounted another chariot and took up his position at the gateway of the formation.

In the midst of the battlefield, Bhima entered the formation and confronted your sons, led by Duhshasana. Filled with rage,

Duhshasana hurled a dart at Bhima, but the mighty Vrikodara swiftly cut it in two with his powerful arrows. Bhima then unleashed his fury upon your sons, slaying Vrindaraka, Abhaya, Raudrakarman, Durvimochana, Vinda, Anuvinda, Suvarman, and Sudarshana. He mowed them down like a tiger decimating a herd of deer. The rest of your sons, trembling in fear, fled from the scene, but Bhima pursued them with relentless speed. Brandishing his mace, he roared with a thunderous sound and hurled it at them, causing devastation in your army, striking down many chariot warriors.

While Bhima was engaged in thinning the enemy ranks, Dronacharya once again stepped forward to face him. Drona killed hundreds of Bhima's supporting troops and pierced Bhima with numerous arrows. However, undeterred, Bhima, his eyes blazing with anger, leapt from his chariot, wielding his mace, and charged at his preceptor. The second son of Kunti easily withstood the deluge of arrows shot from Drona's bow. As he reached Drona's chariot, Bhima grabbed it by its shaft and slammed it forcefully onto the ground, shattering the chariot, its horses, and everything else upon it. Dronacharya, falling from the chariot, swiftly mounted another and headed toward the gateway of the formation.

Bhima continued his onslaught, wreaking havoc upon the colossal Kaurava army like a hurricane tearing through trees. He resisted the divisions of Kritavarman, the Kambhojas, and the Mlecchas. When Bhima caught sight of Arjuna's and Satyaki's chariots in the distance, he let out a resounding roar that reverberated like the thunderous rumble of clouds during the monsoon season. Lord Krishna, Arjuna, and Yudhisthira heard these sounds, understanding that Bhima had spotted Arjuna and Satyaki, who were valiantly triumphing in battle.

Curious, Dhritarashtra asked Sanjaya, "O Sanjaya, while the mighty-armed Bhimasena was engaged in battle, who among our troops had the courage to challenge him? I cannot see any warrior who would dare stand before the son of the Wind god as

he wielded that fearsome mace on the battlefield. I fear Bhima more than Arjuna, Krishna, or Satyaki. He appeared like a blazing fire. Tell me, O Sanjaya, who among our troops had the audacity to fight against that mighty son of Pandu?"

Sanjaya replied, "When Bhima's powerful roars became unbearable, Karna could no longer tolerate them. He rushed at Bhima, stretching his bow to its full extent, and a tremendous duel erupted. Thousands upon thousands of arrows were exchanged between the two warriors. Smiling all the while, Bhima severed Karna's bowstring and killed his charioteer and horses. Karna then descended from his chariot and boarded his son Vrishasena's chariot. Bhima let out a triumphant roar, which resonated among all the Pandava warriors. Hearing Bhima's thunderous shouts, Yudhisthira became invigorated and blew his conchshell, filling the other Pandava warriors with joy.

With Karna's defeat, Duryodhana turned to Dronacharya and spoke with concern, "O great brahmana, Arjuna, Bhima, and Satyaki have successfully breached our formations and are advancing toward Jayadratha. The soldiers are questioning how these warriors could defeat you in battle. The destruction of my army is imminent. O revered preceptor, Arjuna is approaching Jayadratha, and you have promised to protect him. What should be our next course of action?"

Dronacharya replied, "So far, only three mighty warriors have penetrated our formation. Yet, we have as much to fear from the entire Pandava army as we do from these three. Our greatest concern is Arjuna, for he has vowed to slay Jayadratha. Our primary duty is to shield Jayadratha from Arjuna's arrows. You must understand that our defeat today stems from the deceitful gambling match you initiated. Those very dice thrown by Shakuni in the grand assembly hall have now transformed into lethal arrows wielded by the Pandavas. The stake in today's battle is the Sindhu Monarch, Jayadratha. In that gambling match, there was no victory or defeat, but here at Kurukshetra, victory or defeat is at stake. Hurry to Jayadratha and provide

him with all the protection you can. I shall remain here and impede the advancement of the Pandava army."

Obeying his preceptor's command, Duryodhana swiftly went to aid Jayadratha. On his way, he encountered Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, who had previously protected Arjuna's chariot wheels. They were still fighting their way through the formation, and Duryodhana engaged both of them in fierce combat. Duryodhana severed Yudhamanyu's royal standard and shattered his bow. He also killed Yudhamanyu's horses and charioteer. Yudhamanyu mounted the chariot of his brother Uttamaujas, and together they managed to slay Duryodhana's horses and charioteer. Enraged, Duryodhana descended from his chariot and charged at both brothers with a raised mace. Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas swiftly disembarked from their chariot, while Duryodhana demolished it to pieces. Salya, the King of Madras, then picked up Duryodhana, and Yudhamanyu and Uttamaujas, boarding other chariots, continued their path toward Arjuna.

Dhritarashtra inquired with a fervent tone, "O Sanjaya, once before, Bhimasena had triumphed over Karna. How is it then that the Suta's son has once again found himself facing the son of Kunti? Now that Karna has learned about his blood ties with the Pandavas, has he developed compassion for them? O Sanjaya, you possess the ability to narrate events that lie beyond our vision. Tell me honestly what transpired when these two mighty warriors clashed on the battlefield."

Sanjaya responded, "O great monarch, unable to bear Bhima's victory, Karna stepped forward to engage him in battle once more. He showered the son of Kunti with arrows, resembling a cloud pouring down rain upon a mountain. Challenging Bhima, he uttered these words, 'O Bhima, I didn't realize that you possessed the skills of a warrior. Why are you now attempting to reach Krishna and Arjuna, exposing your back to me? If you wish to proceed, you must first defeat me in combat.'"

Enraged by Karna's words, Bhima turned upon him and showered him with a barrage of arrows. He became like a furious cobra that had been intentionally provoked. The two warriors unleashed their mighty weapons, aiming to deliver the fatal blow to one another. They resembled porcupines as they released their weapons with lightning speed. Eventually, Bhima severed Karna's bow, killed his horses and charioteer, and pierced him in the chest with arrows as radiant as the sun. Those arrows passed through Karna's body and penetrated the earth. Afflicted like a trampled snake, Karna climbed onto another chariot and once again advanced towards the second son of Pandu.

When Bhima beheld Karna approaching for battle once more, he showered him with thousands of arrows. Both warriors were consumed by rage and unleashed their chosen weapons, seeking to end the other's life. Ultimately, Bhima severed Karna's bow and killed his horses. Karna then picked up a massive dart and hurled it forcefully at Bhima, but Bhima shattered it with eight arrows. The second son of Kunti proceeded to kill Karna's charioteer and let out a thunderous roar. Overwhelmed by the rain of weapons, Karna became confused and unsure of what to do.

Observing Karna's plight, Duryodhana commanded Durjaya, saying, "Go, O Durjaya, and save Karna from certain death at the hands of Bhima." Obediently following his brother's order, Durjaya confronted Bhima and pierced him with nine arrows, his charioteer with seven, and his horses with eight. Bhima, rising up like a cobra, pierced Durjaya with ten arrows that pierced his body and emerged from his back. Becoming senseless, Durjaya fell to the ground, bereft of life. Filled with grief, Karna descended from his chariot and circled around Durjaya's lifeless body, shedding tears. When Bhima had disarmed Karna and deprived him of his chariot, he showered him with arrows, making him resemble a forested mountain.

Karna quickly ascended another chariot and resumed his battle with Bhima. The combat between them was intense, but the son of the Wind god once again rendered Karna chariotless through his skillful use of a mace. Fighting on foot, Karna managed to withstand Bhima's charging onslaught. Duryodhana, witnessing the situation, ordered his brother Durmukha, "The son of Radha has been dismounted from his chariot and is now fiercely fighting Bhima on foot. Hurry and take him on your chariot." Acting upon the King's command, Durmukha swiftly attacked Bhima, covering him with numerous arrows. Bhima retaliated by charging at Durmukha, disregarding Karna. With his bow fully stretched, Bhima released nine arrows that brought an end to Durmukha's life. All of this occurred before the eyes of Duryodhana and Karna. Fallen from his chariot, Durmukha writhed on the ground like a snake. With tears in his eyes, Karna circumambulated Durmukha's lifeless body and then mounted his own chariot. Thus, the mighty Bhima had now defeated Karna for the third time.

Sanjaya continued, "O King, witnessing Karna's defeat, five of your sons—Durmarshana, Duhshaha, Durmada, Durdhara, and Jaya—rushed at Bhima to kill him. They surrounded him and unleashed a volley of arrows upon him. Karna also came to their aid. Bhima confronted Karna, piercing him with arrows from all directions. In the presence of the Suta's son, Vrikodara slew those five sons. They fell from their chariots like trees crashing to the earth. With the demise of these five brave warriors, five other sons of yours—Chitra, Upachitra, Charuchitra, Sarasan, Chitrayudha, and Chitravarman—rushed at Bhima and encircled him with their chariots. Though they fought valiantly, they were no match for Bhima. The second son of Pandu pierced each of them with a single arrow, sending them to the abode of Yamaraja. Overwhelmed with sorrow, Karna shed tears and recollected Vidura's wise counsel."

As Bhima stood amidst the fallen bodies of Duryodhana's brothers, a fire burned within him, fueled by his grief and thirst for vengeance. He knew that Karna, the Suta's son, was his primary adversary, the one he needed to defeat to pave the way for the Pandavas' victory. And so, the two mighty warriors clashed once again, their weapons clashing like thunderbolts in the stormy sky.

Bhima, wielding his massive mace, unleashed a relentless assault upon Karna. But the son of Radha was no ordinary warrior. He skillfully dodged Bhima's blows, evading the onslaught with agility and precision. Bhima's arrows fell upon Karna like a hailstorm, piercing his armor and drawing blood. Yet, Karna remained undeterred, his determination unwavering.

The battle raged on, with neither warrior giving an inch. Karna aimed at Bhima's chariot, unleashing a barrage of arrows that shattered the wooden frame and sent Bhima's horses fleeing in terror. Now dismounted, Bhima took up a sword and shield, ready to face Karna on equal ground.

Their clash intensified as Karna, with his bow in hand, aimed for Bhima's heart. But Bhima, fueled by his rage and determination, deflected Karna's arrows with his shield, each strike ringing out like a clash of titans. The ground trembled beneath their feet as they exchanged blows, the sound of their clash reverberating across the battlefield.

Bhima, momentarily weaponless, resorted to unconventional tactics. He picked up the lifeless bodies of elephants and hurled them at Karna's chariot, seeking to impede his advance. But Karna, his reflexes honed to perfection, sliced through the airborne carcasses, shattering them into pieces.

Undeterred, Bhima continued his assault, throwing everything within his reach—elephants, horses, chariots—anything that could be transformed into a weapon against his foe. Karna, a master of archery, expertly cut through each projectile, his skill unmatched.

In a moment of recklessness, Bhima contemplated engaging Karna in hand-to-hand combat, his powerful fists poised to strike. But then, the memory of Arjuna's vow to slay Karna flashed in his mind. Bhima knew he had a greater purpose—to fulfill his brother's oath and bring an end to Karna's reign of terror.

Just as the battle seemed to reach its crescendo, Krishna and Arjuna arrived on the scene, their divine presence radiating with unparalleled power. Arjuna, the unparalleled archer, aimed his arrows at Karna, further pressuring the beleaguered warrior. Karna, sensing the overwhelming force arrayed against him, turned and fled from Bhima's presence, seeking shelter among the Kaurava ranks.

But Arjuna was not to be denied. He unleashed a celestial weapon, infused with the might of a thunderbolt, aiming it directly at Karna. However, Ashvatthama, the loyal ally of the Kauravas, swiftly intervened, intercepting the weapon with his own arsenal.

Fearful of facing Arjuna head-on, Ashvatthama disappeared into a Kaurava division, blending amidst the majestic elephants that served as a shield. Arjuna, undeterred, turned his attention to the Kaurava army, engaging them with unmatched skill and ferocity, his arrows laying waste to their ranks.

The battlefield was now a theater of chaos, where heroes clashed, alliances shifted, and destinies hung in the balance. The struggle between Bhima and Karna was momentarily halted, but the fire within them burned brighter than ever, as the war of Kurukshetra thundered towards its cataclysmic climax.

Chapter 40

The Death of Jayadratha

Dhritarastra leaned forward, his blind eyes wide with anticipation. "Tell me, Sanjaya, what transpired as the sun dipped toward the western horizon? How did the mighty Arjuna seek to vanquish Jayadratha, the ruler of the Sindhus?"

Sanjaya, ever the faithful narrator, began his tale. "O King, as Partha and Krishna observed Satyaki making his way toward them, Krishna turned to Arjuna and spoke with a sense of admiration. 'Behold, Partha, in the distance approaches Satyaki, the grandson of Sini. He has proven himself a fearless warrior, defeating renowned chariot fighters and overcoming formidable adversaries. He has vanquished Drona, the preceptor, and triumphed over mighty Kritavarman. Undoubtedly, he has been sent by Yudhisthira to assist us in our quest to subdue the great maharathis who stand before us.'

Arjuna, however, expressed his concern. 'Keshava,' he replied, 'I am uneasy with Satyaki's absence from the protection of the King. Now, in addition to worrying about Satyaki, I must also worry for Yudhisthira's safety. Look, Bhurishravas approaches

to challenge Satyaki. The grandson of Sini appears weary, his weapons depleted, and his horses fatigued. In contrast, Bhurishravas has not yet faced any opponent, and his horses and arsenal remain fresh. I fear the outcome of this impending duel.'

Sanjaya continued his narration, relaying the bitter exchange of words between the two warriors. "When Bhurishravas drew near Satyaki, he unleashed a volley of harsh words, taunting him mercilessly. 'By sheer fortune, you have come within my grasp today,' Bhurishravas declared. 'I will fulfill my father's long-cherished desire and bring joy to King Duryodhana's heart by slaying you in the presence of Krishna and Arjuna. Your death will wipe away the tears of the wives whose husbands you have mercilessly slaughtered on the battlefield.'

Unfazed, Satyaki replied with unwavering confidence, his voice dripping with disdain for his foe. 'Fear has never gripped my heart in battle,' he retorted, 'and your attempts to terrify me shall prove in vain. Your empty boasts hold no weight, for you shall be held accountable for your words. Your foolishness amuses me, and I cannot help but laugh. Today, in front of your followers, I shall dispatch you to the realm of death, bringing joy to the heart of our revered preceptor, Arjuna.'

And so, the clash between Satyaki and Bhurishravas commenced, their duel reminiscent of two raging elephants, each driven by an insatiable thirst for victory. A deluge of arrows rained down upon them as they maneuvered, seeking an opportune moment to strike the fatal blow. Satyaki managed to slay Bhurishravas's horses, while Somadatta's valiant son reciprocated by felling Satyaki's noble steeds. With their chariots rendered useless, they reached for swords and shields, engaging in a brutal exchange akin to two bulls vying for dominance.

Blows were traded, revolutions executed with grace, and their bodies bore the scars of their fierce contest. Bhurishravas ultimately dealt a devastating blow, toppling Satyaki to the

ground. Seizing him by the hair, he delivered a brutal kick to his chest, preparing to sever his head with a swift stroke of his sword. But Lord Krishna, ever watchful, turned to Arjuna and urged him to intervene. 'Arjuna, behold! Bhurishravas has bested Satyaki, and now, exhausted from his arduous journey, our valiant comrade is on the verge of perishing at the hands of this mighty Kuru warrior. We cannot allow this to pass.'

Arjuna, fueled by his vow to protect Satyaki, swiftly drew a razor-faced arrow and notched it on his renowned Gandiva bow. As Bhurishravas raised his sword to deliver the killing blow, Arjuna released his weapon, severing the arm that wielded the deadly blade. Bhurishravas, his eyes blazing with fury, turned his wrathful gaze upon Arjuna and unleashed a torrent of reproach. 'O son of Kunti, you have perpetrated a cowardly act! While I was engaged in battle with another warrior, you, without honor, severed my arm. How will you defend such treachery in the presence of the great warriors assembled here? You, born of royal lineage, trained by mighty preceptors Drona and Kripa, blessed with the teachings of Indra and Lord Shiva, yet you stoop to despicable deeds. Undoubtedly, this vile act has received Krishna's endorsement, for he is kin to the one about to meet his demise. The Vrishnis and Andakas are tainted with deceit, and their influence has corrupted you, compelling you to commit such heartless acts of cowardice.'"

The scene was set, tensions mounting as the clash of mighty warriors echoed across the battlefield. The fate of heroes hung in the balance, their valor and allegiances put to the ultimate test. Dhritarastra, enthralled by the tale, leaned closer, his hunger for the outcome burning as fiercely as the battlefield itself.

Arjuna's voice thundered through the air, slicing through Bhurishravas's misguided accusations. "You're blind to the truth, Somadatta's son," he retorted. "You dare chastise Krishna and me for an act that holds no taint of sin? Ignorance has clouded

your judgment. As a warrior who knows the rules of combat, I would never stoop to an immoral act on this battlefield."

Arjuna continued, his words laced with conviction. "Kshatriyas, like Satyaki, fight with the support of their comrades and kin. It is my sacred duty to protect him, to be his shield in battle. If I had allowed Satyaki to be slain under my watch, I would have succumbed to the sin of negligence. You, Bhurishravas, sought to kill Satyaki when he was weakened from single-handedly battling the Kuru army. You seized the opportunity and triumphed. But you should blame yourself for your lack of caution, for not safeguarding your own well-being. Tell me, O hero, how would you have treated someone who depended on you?"

Bhurishravas, silenced by Arjuna's impassioned words, abandoned his pursuit of Satyaki. Instead, he settled into a meditative posture, spreading a seat of arrows with his left hand, prepared to transcend his mortal form. The warriors witnessing this act of sacrifice held Somadatta's son in high regard, while deriding the actions of Krishna and Arjuna. Unwilling to tolerate their criticism, Arjuna raised his voice, addressing the entire assembly.

"Each one of you here knows my unwavering vow," Arjuna declared firmly. "No one who stands on the side of the Pandavas, within the reach of my arrows, shall find success in slaying them. Remember this, Bhurishravas, and do not blame me. Severing your arm while you were engaged in combat with Satyaki does not defy morality. Yet, where was your sense of morality when my own son, Abhimanyu, was unjustly defeated by six powerful warriors? He was defenseless and weaponless, yet you rained arrows upon him."

Bhurishravas, unable to counter Arjuna's words of truth, persisted in his meditative state, determined to embrace death. Undeterred, Arjuna spoke once more, his voice tinged with compassion. "O son of Somadatta, you are a member of our

family, dear to me just as my own brothers are. I hold deep affection for you. Now, you may attain that destination reserved only for those who possess the prowess of great mystic yogis."

The resonant voice of Lord Krishna joined the conversation. "O Bhurishravas," he said, his words carrying a divine authority. "I am also pleased with your constant offerings of sacrifices and fire rituals. Ascend to My spiritual abode, free from the contamination of this material world. It is a destination coveted by even Lord Brahma, the highest celestial deity. This realm represents the ultimate purpose of life. When your soul departs its mortal coil, my celestial carrier, Garuda, shall transport you to that ethereal realm."

Sanjaya's narration continued. Satyaki, having regained consciousness, rose to his feet, drawing his sword, an intense desire to sever Bhurishravas's head burning within him. Despite the warriors' collective admonishments, Satyaki persisted in his merciless intention, poised to strike the defenseless and sinless son of Somadatta, who sat immersed in meditation. Krishna, Arjuna, Bhima, Uttamaujas, and Yudhamanyu added their voices to the chorus, vehemently dissuading Satyaki from proceeding with what appeared to be an act of vengeance. Even as the soldiers and celestial beings observed in disapproval, Satyaki disregarded their pleas, executing a swift motion that severed Bhurishravas's head, a sudden end to his journey towards the spiritual realm.

The Kaurava heroes, conversing in hushed tones, acknowledged the inevitability of Bhurishravas's demise. "The fault does not lie with the valiant Vrishni warrior," they murmured. "This was a predestined event, ordained by higher powers. It is futile to pass judgment on whether it is right or wrong."

Satyaki, unyielding in the face of disapproval, lashed out at the Kaurava warriors with unwavering resolve. "You, all of you, are sinful beings, masquerading as righteous men," he declared boldly. "Where was your righteousness when Abhimanyu,

fighting on foot, was slain by seven renowned warriors? I have already vowed that anyone who strikes me, even a practitioner of asceticism, shall meet their end. The will of providence is supreme, and it unfolds as it must."

Sanjaya's voice resonated with the intensity of a pulp narrator, his words gripping the air. "O mighty King," he began, "after Satyaki's impassioned words echoed through the battlefield, a profound silence settled upon the warriors, both on the Pandava and Kaurava sides. Yet, in the recesses of their minds, they exalted the heroic son of Somadatta, honoring his valor."

Curiosity brimming within him, Dhritarastra sought answers. "How is it," he asked, "that Satyaki, who had vanquished the likes of Drona, Karna, and Kritavarman, was thrown to the ground by the Kuru warrior Bhurishravas? Satyaki had crossed the vast ocean of Kauravas, defying their might. Explain this enigma to me, Sanjaya."

Sanjaya's voice carried a hint of mystery as he unraveled the tale. "Listen, O King, for I shall reveal the hidden intricacies of this predestined event, a divine benediction bestowed by Lord Shiva upon the Kuru descendant Somadatta. In the illustrious Yadu lineage, there resided a formidable hero named Surasena, blessed with numerous sons. Among them, Sini and Vasudeva shone with resplendence. During Devaki's Svayamvara ceremony, Sini, driven by his indomitable spirit, abducted Devaki and vanquished all the kings who dared to oppose him."

Sanjaya's voice grew more animated as he painted the scene. "Somadatta, however, could not tolerate this audacious act and challenged Sini to a duel. A fierce battle erupted, lasting half a day, until Sini finally triumphed, throwing Somadatta to the ground and striking him with his foot in the presence of countless warriors. Yet, moved by compassion, Sini spared the Kuru hero's life and allowed him to depart. Consumed by

humiliation, Somadatta retreated to the forest and embarked on severe penance, seeking the favor of Lord Shiva."

A sense of awe laced Sanjaya's words as he described the pivotal moment. "When the great Mahadeva, pleased by Somadatta's devotion, manifested before him, he offered the warrior a boon. And Somadatta, in his anguish, beseeched the Lord, saying, 'Grant me a son who can defeat Sini's descendant in combat and strike him with his foot amidst a throng of warriors.' Lord Shiva, in his benevolence, granted this fervent request. Thus, Bhurishravas, as the son of Somadatta, and Satyaki, as the scion of Sini, came into being. The Vrishni heroes, empowered by Lord Shiva's benediction, became invincible on the battlefield, surpassing all others in prowess."

Eager for further enlightenment, Dhritarastra posed his next query. "O Sanjaya, tell me, what transpired when the great maharathi Bhurishravas met his demise? And as the sun neared the horizon, what unfolded for Krishna and Arjuna?"

Sanjaya, ever the masterful narrator, continued the tale. "O descendant of Bharata," he answered, "after Bhurishravas, the valiant Kuru general, ascended to the spiritual realm, the resolute Arjuna turned to Lord Vasudeva and beseeched him, 'O Krishna, guide me to the battlefield where Jayadratha, the King of the Sindhus, stands. The sun sinks low, and the time for fulfilling my vow approaches. Jayadratha is shielded by a phalanx of heroic chariot warriors, making his defeat a formidable challenge. Drive our celestial chariot toward him, for I shall vanquish the Kuru host and slay Jayadratha.'"

With the urgency of impending destiny, Sanjaya's voice quickened its pace. "Following the command of his devoted disciple, Lord Krishna steered the celestial chariot, carrying Arjuna, toward the Suchimukha formation where Jayadratha sought refuge. Witnessing their approach, King Duryodhana urged Karna, his loyal ally, 'The moment of battle has arrived, Karna. Protect Jayadratha with all your might and thwart

Arjuna's vow. If Jayadratha remains unscathed, Arjuna will be forced to immolate himself, and with his death, victory shall slip into our grasp. Once Arjuna is vanquished, the remaining Pandavas shall be easy prey, and we shall reign supreme over this world, with its vast oceans and distant isles. Within this formation stand Ashvatthama, Kripa, Kritavarman, Duhshasana, Salya, you, and I. How can Arjuna possibly overcome such a formidable force?'"

The air crackled with anticipation as Dhritarastra absorbed the unfolding drama, his mind entangled in the web of fate.

As the tumultuous battle raged on, the valiant Karna, his body pierced by Bhima's arrows, stood resolute before King Duryodhana. "Though my limbs ache with pain," Karna declared, "I shall fight with all my might, for I have dedicated my life to your cause. As long as I am in the fray, the formidable Arjuna will not be able to fulfill his vow. Destiny alone shall determine the outcome."

Amidst their conversation, Arjuna, with unwavering determination, tore through the Kaurava ranks, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake as he pursued his target, Jayadratha. Foot soldiers, horsemen, chariot warriors, and elephant riders charged at Arjuna, desperate to impede his progress. Yet, like moths drawn to a flame, they found themselves face to face with Arjuna's celestial weapons, meeting their demise. Those who met their end, their minds filled with awe for the marvelous deeds of Lord Krishna and Arjuna, ascended to the divine abode of Vaikuntha. Those fortunate souls who beheld, in their final moments, the image of Lord Krishna with His resplendent face, adorned with black, curling locks and a majestic crown embellished with a peacock feather, found eternal liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The Lord, tirelessly driving his devotee's chariot, appeared to be exerting great effort. Beads of sweat adorned his brow, and blood flowed from the wounds

inflicted by arrows on his divine form, adding to his enchanting beauty. By guiding Arjuna's chariot, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna, bestowed liberation upon all who perished in his presence—a manifestation of his boundless mercy.

Meanwhile, Arjuna, in his relentless pursuit, cleaved through the Kaurava army, leaving a trail of carnage in his wake. Duryodhana, Karna, Vrishasena, Salya, Ashvatthama, and Kripa rushed to shield Jayadratha from Arjuna's wrath. They unleashed a barrage of hundreds of arrows, obscuring Krishna and Arjuna's chariot from view. However, Arjuna swiftly countered, piercing each of those great warriors with numerous shafts. Bhimasena and Satyaki fought alongside Arjuna, bolstering his assault against the mighty Kaurava warriors. Arjuna unleashed a hundred arrows, causing blood to flow from Karna's wounds, who retaliated by releasing fifty arrows that struck Phalguna and ten arrows that pierced Krishna himself. Enraged by this audacity, Arjuna shattered Karna's bow and pierced his chest with nine arrows. Drawing forth a celestial weapon glowing with the radiance of the sun, Arjuna launched it toward Karna. Yet, Ashvatthama intercepted it with the speed of a meteor, shattering it mid-air before it could reach Karna. Undeterred, Karna grasped another bow, unleashing a relentless hailstorm of arrows upon Arjuna. Their battle intensified, their roars echoing like enraged bulls, as they filled the sky with a barrage of deadly projectiles.

In the heat of the battle, Arjuna severed the head of Karna's charioteer, sending his horses into a frenzied rampage. Swiftly, Ashvatthama appeared on the scene, ferrying Karna away on his own chariot, ensuring their relentless assault against Partha continued. Salya pierced Arjuna with thirty arrows, while Kripa targeted Lord Krishna with twenty. Arjuna retaliated, impaling Salya with a hundred arrows and Kripa with twenty. As the intensity of the conflict reached its zenith, Arjuna invoked the Varuna weapon, instilling paralyzing fear in the hearts of Duryodhana's army. Yet, driven by their duty to protect

Jayadratha, they redoubled their efforts, racing toward Arjuna with unwavering determination. The cardinal directions became a swirling maelstrom of weapons as the Kaurava forces converged upon the son of Kunti. Foot soldiers hurled javelins and battle axes, some launched maces, while others charged at Arjuna's chariot, brandishing upraised swords. But all met their doom as Pandu's son shattered their weapons and severed their limbs. The resounding twang of Gandiva, Arjuna's bow, echoed like thunder in a rain-laden sky, while his arrows streaked through the air like lightning bolts. Arjuna then invoked the Aindra weapon, and from his bow erupted a veritable deluge of thousands upon thousands of blazing, fiery arrows. Empowered by the celestial weapon, each arrow claimed the lives of countless infantrymen, horsemen, and chariot warriors. Giant elephants crashed to the earth, their massive frames felled by the relentless advance of Kunti's son as he closed in on Jayadratha, unwavering in his pursuit

As the sun neared the horizon, casting a reddish hue upon the sky, Krishna, driving Arjuna's chariot with increased speed, finally caught sight of Jayadratha. Recognizing his flagstaff adorned with the boar emblem, Arjuna swiftly launched sixty-four arrows, piercing Jayadratha and letting out a triumphant shout. Enraged by this assault, Jayadratha retaliated, striking Arjuna with six arrows resembling venomous serpents and Krishna with three arrows. The entire Kaurava army closed in, unleashing a torrent of weapons upon Arjuna. The chariot became difficult to navigate through the mass of fallen soldiers. Sensing the challenge, Krishna devised a plan.

Addressing Arjuna, Lord Krishna said, "Behold, O son of Kunti, how Jayadratha is carefully guarded by six mighty warriors. Unless you vanquish those six Maharathis, you will never be able to slay Jayadratha. Therefore, I shall veil the radiant sun with My own divine potency, making it appear as though the sun has set. At that moment, Jayadratha will no longer remain vigilant. Seize this opportunity and sever his head with your arrows. Do not fear the darkness, for it is merely a manifestation

of My internal potency, intended to assist you in Jayadratha's demise."

The Supreme Personality of Godhead then utilized His mighty powers to cloak the sun, creating the illusion of sunset. All the Kaurava warriors, including Jayadratha, turned their attention toward the sun's path, assuming that Arjuna would have to face the ordeal of passing through fire. While Jayadratha was absorbed in observing the setting sun, Lord Krishna instructed Arjuna, "Observe how the King of Sindhu is joyfully gazing at the setting sun, having cast aside all fear of you. Seize the opportunity and strike him down with the weapon bestowed upon you by Lord Shiva."

With great swiftness, Krishna drove the chariot toward Jayadratha. Arjuna, in the midst of battle, skillfully engaged and drove away each of the formidable warriors, perplexing them with his actions. Though they tried to impede his progress, the force of Arjuna's weapons repelled them. The battlefield was congested with soldiers, and Arjuna had to carve a path toward Jayadratha. Drawing forth the divine Pashupati astra given by Lord Shiva, Arjuna prepared to unleash its power. Krishna once again advised him, "O Dhananjaya, swiftly sever the head of the sinful Jayadratha. But ensure that the head does not touch the ground. It is known that Jayadratha's father, Vriddhakshetra, protected him with a benediction, stating that anyone who causes his son's head to touch the ground will see their own head shatter into a hundred pieces. Vriddhakshetra has retired to the nearby forest for meditation. After beheading Jayadratha, guide the arrow along with his head to the lap of his father. Vriddhakshetra will then cast the head to the ground, resulting in his own demise."

Abiding by the instructions of the Lord of the universe, Arjuna drew his bowstring to its fullest extent and released the mighty Pashupati astra. Like a bolt of lightning, it cleaved through the air, severing Jayadratha's head from his body. The head continued its trajectory toward the Samanta-panchaka

pilgrimage site. King Vriddhakshetra, engaged in his evening prayers, was astounded to find a severed head with black hair and sparkling earrings land in his lap. He instinctively cast the head to the ground, causing his own head to shatter into fragments. Witnessing this spectacle, the celestial beings were filled with awe and applauded the prowess of Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

With Jayadratha's demise, the darkness brought about by Krishna's mystic power dissipated, and once again, the sun appeared on the horizon. The Kauravas realized that the darkness had been orchestrated by Krishna's mystical abilities, and they understood that as long as the Supreme Lord rode upon Arjuna's chariot, victory was impossible for them. On that day, Arjuna annihilated seven divisions of the enemy's army, amounting to approximately two million soldiers. Those who saw Lord Krishna on Arjuna's chariot attained liberation from the cycle of birth and death. They entered either the impersonal Brahman effulgence or the eternal kingdom of God. Such was the magnanimous mercy of Lord Krishna.

Panchajanya and Devadatta, resonating their victorious sounds throughout the heavens. Even Yudhisthira, who was many miles away, heard the sound and understood that Jayadratha had been killed. The entire Pandava army rejoiced with jubilation.

Meanwhile, Krishna blew His conchshell with the Rishava note, signaling Daruka to bring His chariot. Daruka swiftly arrived and awaited instructions from his beloved Lord. Krishna commanded him, "Take Satyaki on this chariot and assist him in his confrontation with Karna."

Daruka promptly reached the battleground where Satyaki was engaged in combat. Satyaki boarded Krishna's chariot, prepared to face Karna who was filled with fury over Jayadratha's demise. Karna attacked Satyaki with all his might, but in the end, his horses and chariot driver were slain. To protect Karna from death, Ashvatthama, Salya, and Vrishasena surrounded Satyaki,

showering him with a barrage of arrows. In response, Karna swiftly ascended Duryodhana's chariot. Satyaki defeated Ashvatthama, Salya, and Vrishasena but refrained from killing Duryodhana's brothers, remembering Bhima's vow. Satyaki's martial prowess was unmatched among the Kuru warriors. He had vanquished Drona, Karna, and slain Jalasandha and Bhurishravas. On that eventful day, Arjuna, Satyaki, and Bhima together decimated eight divisions of troops.

Dhritarashtra inquired, "After Bhima's chariot was destroyed, what did the second son of Kunti, Bhima, do?"

Sanjaya replied, "O King, when Bhima was rendered chariotless, Arjuna approached him. Bhima recounted all the insulting words Karna had hurled at him, mocking him as a fool and a glutton. Enraged, Arjuna approached Karna and loudly addressed him, 'O wicked son of a charioteer, you are filled with false pride. Bhima has defeated you multiple times, and now even Satyaki has bested you. Yet you continue to consider yourself great. You have spoken harshly of Bhima and cut the bowstring of my son when he wasn't looking. My son Abhimanyu was unfairly killed in battle by cowards like you. For these offenses, you shall die in battle along with your relatives and friends. I vow to slay your son Vrishasena before your eyes. After his death, I will kill you, and I will relish the sight of Duryodhana shedding tears of sorrow.'

As the sun descended beyond the western horizon, Lord Krishna spoke to Arjuna, saying, 'By good fortune, O Phalguna, you have fulfilled your vow. Many mighty chariot warriors have been slain, and Jayadratha has met his destined end. No other warrior could have accomplished this feat.'

Arjuna replied to Lord Krishna, 'By Your grace, O Janardana, I have fulfilled my vow. O my Lord, with You as the master of the Pandavas, victory seems effortless. Through Your grace, Yudhisthira will conquer Dhritarashtra's sons and attain dominion over the entire Earth. This victory, my Lord, belongs

to You, and all our prosperity is due to Your divine presence. O Slayer of the Madhu demon, please accept us as Your surrendered servants and guide us as You deem fit.'

Sanjaya continued, 'After exchanging these words, the two Krishnas approached Yudhisthira. Upon meeting the King, Lord Krishna conveyed the news, 'O King, by good fortune, your younger brother has fulfilled his vow. The King of Sindhu has been slain, and victory is now within your grasp.'

Upon receiving this information from Lord Krishna, the King descended from his chariot with tearful eyes. He affectionately embraced Arjuna and Krishna and addressed them, saying, 'O Vasudeva, You are the master of the three worlds, and those who have You as their guide can never be defeated in their struggles. O mighty-armed one, You are the creator of this cosmic manifestation, and You reside as the Supersoul within everyone's heart. The Vedic mantras glorify Your divine qualities. O Hrishikesha, those who take refuge in You will attain the highest prosperity in this material world.'

Lord Krishna replied, 'My dear King Yudhisthira, I consider the Kauravas and their allies to be already vanquished. One who has harmed My devoted followers can never find happiness in this world. Those who have caused harm to My pure devotees will lose their kingdoms, families, and wealth.

Chapter 41

the night battle

The night battle raged on at Kurukshetra, shrouded in darkness and engulfed in chaos. Dronacharya, the invincible preceptor of the Kaurava army, could not bear the violation of his vow and led his forces against the Pandavas. Despite the lack of daylight, they fought with a ferocity that matched the darkest hour.

In the midst of this tumultuous clash, the Somakas, driven by their desire to end Dronacharya's life, launched a fierce assault on him. King Shivi, leading his division, confronted the preceptor like a tempest. With thirty arrows, he pierced Dronacharya's chest, and his chariot driver fell lifeless. Seizing the opportunity, Dronacharya's chariot was swiftly replaced, and he retaliated against King Shivi, slaying his four horses and severing his head. Enraged by this act, Dronacharya unleashed his celestial weapons upon the Somaka ranks, wreaking havoc with his devastating power.

Meanwhile, the son of the Kalinga King, supported by his warriors, charged at Bhimasena, seeking vengeance for his father's demise at Bhima's hands. Bhima, unwilling to tolerate such impudence, swiftly leaped onto his chariot. With his bare hands, he lifted the King's son and delivered a fatal blow with a single punch, shattering his bones and leaving him lifeless on the ground. Not stopping there, Bhima advanced towards Druva, the slain prince's brother, roaring with fury. He dragged Druva from his chariot and mercilessly struck him down with his powerful fists. Bhima's wrath knew no bounds as he then turned his attention to Jayarata, a mighty Kalinga hero. With a single slap, Bhima ended Jayarata's life, all within the sight of Karna, who could not bear witness to Bhima's unrivaled strength. In a desperate attempt to counter Bhima, Karna hurled a dart at him with all his might, but Bhima effortlessly caught it in his hand and hurled it back, blazing like a meteor. However, Shakuni intervened and shattered the dart into pieces with his arrows.

Undeterred, Bhima ascended his chariot, challenging the Kaurava warriors who thirsted for battle. He confronted Durmada, Duryodhana's brother, and swiftly neutralized his horses and charioteer. Durmada then joined forces with his brother Dushkarna, and together they launched a counterattack on Bhima. However, Bhima's might was unstoppable. He trampled their chariot and pounded it into the ground, annihilating the two brothers with his powerful fists. The sight of Bhima's terrifying appearance struck fear into the hearts of all Kuru warriors, prompting them to flee from the battlefield.

The night battle intensified, and Kurukshetra seemed to transform into the domain of Yamaraja, the god of death. Ghatotkacha, surrounded by an akshauhini division of Rakshasas, confronted Ashvatthama, employing his mystical powers of illusion. Ghatotkacha's son, Anjanaparvan, engaged in a fierce duel with Dronacharya's son. In the end, Ashvatthama rendered Anjanaparvan chariotless, and as he descended from his chariot, Anjanaparvan hurled a scimitar at Ashvatthama. Yet, Ashvatthama shattered the weapon in mid-air. Infuriated, Anjanaparvan ascended into the sky, raining down trees with his Rakshasa illusion. However, Ashvatthama swiftly killed him with a volley of arrows as he plummeted to the ground.

Enraged by his son's demise, Ghatotkacha fiercely attacked Ashvatthama, supported by his akshauhini division of soldiers. A barrage of weapons, including arrows, javelins, darts, maces, battle axes, and swords, filled the sky, unleashed by those renowned warriors upon Ashvatthama's chariot. Yet, Ashvatthama invoked his celestial weapons, obliterating the onslaught with sheer might. Ghatotkacha then hurled a celestial mace at Ashvatthama, who caught it effortlessly and unleashed it with full force, demolishing Ghatotkacha's chariot. Bhima's son, unscathed, leaped onto Dhristadyumna's chariot and continued to confront Dronacharya's son. Ashvatthama unleashed one of his celestial weapons, and with its potency, he slew a hundred thousand Rakshasa warriors who assailed him. The sky blazed with hundreds and thousands of arrows as

Ashvatthama reduced the akshauhini division to ashes. Witnessing the massacre of the Rakshasa troops, Ghatotkacha burned with even greater rage, intensifying his assault with relentless fervor.

The night battle at Kurukshetra raged on, its horrors intensified by the bloodshed and the valor displayed by the warriors. The outcome of this fateful clash would shape the destiny of kingdoms and the lives of heroes.

Ashvatthama, the dark warrior, unleashed his fury upon the battlefield. No one was safe from his relentless assault. Suratha and Satrunjaya, sons of King Drupada, fell to his deadly arrows, their life forces extinguished in an instant. Even the ten sons of King Kuntibhoja met their end at Ashvatthama's hands, their hopes and dreams shattered like fragile glass.

With an arrow that seemed to embody death itself, Drona's son aimed for Ghatotkacha's chest. The arrow pierced through his mighty form and disappeared into the earth, leaving Ghatotkacha gravely wounded. Bhima's son collapsed onto the floor of Dhristadyumna's chariot, his life hanging by a thread. In a desperate attempt to save him, Dhristadyumna carried him away from the raging battle.

Somadatta, grieving the loss of his son Bhurishravas, sought vengeance against Satyaki. Under the cover of darkness, they clashed with deadly weapons, each determined to be the victor. Somadatta taunted Satyaki, accusing him of thieving tactics and condemning his actions. Satyaki, unyielding in his resolve, retorted with a promise to end Somadatta's life, just as he had done to his sons. The two warriors engaged in a fierce duel, unleashing their weapons with deadly precision. Bhima joined the fray, launching a wooden mallet towards Somadatta's head. At the same time, Satyaki released an arrow that blazed through the night sky like lightning. Both projectiles struck Somadatta simultaneously, plunging him into a state of unconsciousness.

Witnessing his father's fall, Bahlika, the brother of Maharaja Shantanu and a descendant of the Kuru dynasty, challenged Satyaki with all his might. Bahlika unleashed his formidable weapons, aiming to defeat his opponent. He even launched a dart at Bhima, causing him to lose consciousness on the floor of his chariot. But Bhima quickly regained his senses, seized a mighty mace, and hurled it at his granduncle Bahlika. The mace severed Bahlika's head from his body, sending him crashing to the ground like a lightning-struck tree.

Infuriated by this act, ten of Duryodhana's sons, filled with a burning desire for revenge, descended upon Bhima like a pack of hungry wolves. Nagadatta, Dridharatha, Viravahu, Ayobhuja, Dridha, Suhasta, Viragas, Pramatha, Ugrayayin—each met their doom swiftly. Bhima's lethal arrows found their marks, sending them to the realm of Yamaraja, the god of death. Bhima's wrath didn't stop there. He pursued Vrikaratha, Karna's brother, and five of Shakuni's brothers—Gavaksha, Sarabha, Bibhu, Subhaga, and Bhanudatta. They, too, fell victim to his unyielding strength, their lives snuffed out like flickering candles.

Duryodhana, witnessing the relentless onslaught of the Pandavas, turned to his loyal friend Karna, seeking salvation from the impending doom. He implored Karna to save their warriors from certain annihilation and crush the pride of the victorious Pandavas with his forceful arrows.

Karna, exuding confidence, assured Duryodhana that even if the mighty Indra himself were to stand against him, he would prevail. He vowed to slay Arjuna with the divine weapon bestowed upon him by Indra and promised Duryodhana world sovereignty. Karna's words were filled with bravado, but Kripacharya, not swayed by empty boasts, reminded Karna of his past defeats. He pointed out the times when Karna had faced the sons of Pandu and met with failure, highlighting his lack of success in crucial battles. Kripacharya questioned Karna's worthiness as a match for any of the Pandavas, emphasizing that true valor lies not in empty words but in proving one's prowess

on the battlefield. Kripacharya concluded by reminding Karna of the countless times the divine sons of Kunti had shattered his lofty ambitions, reducing them to mere illusions in the face of their might.

The fate of the battlefield hung in the balance as these fierce warriors clashed, their destinies intertwined in a dance of death and glory.

"I shall conquer Arjuna," declared Karna, his voice filled with unwavering confidence. "With the divine dart bestowed upon me by Indra, the king of heavens, Arjuna will meet his demise. Once he falls, the other Pandavas will crumble like a house of cards. The earth shall become the sole domain of the mighty Kuru dynasty. I speak these words knowing the truth of my prowess. As for you, old brahmana, you lack skill in battle, and your greatest flaw is seeking refuge with the Pandavas. If you dare speak to me in such a manner again, I shall cut out your treacherous tongue. Countless great warriors, led by the formidable Bhishma himself, have perished in this war. But mark my words, they are all greater than the Pandavas. It is destiny that conspires against us, not the Pandavas. O wretched soul, I shall continue to fight with all my might, and in the end, you shall witness Kunti's sons falling to my arrows."

Sanjaya continued, his narrative filled with the pulse of battle: Inflamed by Karna's harsh words, Ashvatthama unsheathed his scimitar and lunged towards Karna, intent on ending his life. But Duryodhana swiftly intervened, grabbing hold of Drona's enraged son before he could inflict harm upon Karna. Duryodhana pleaded with Ashvatthama, "O Ashvatthama, anger does not befit a brahmana. O virtuous one, do not be consumed by fury towards Karna, who seeks to uplift our spirits. Forgive him, and let us together unleash our might upon the Pandava forces." Suppressing their seething anger, both Kripa and Ashvatthama pardoned Karna outwardly, but deep within, they knew that the Suta's son would be humbled when he faced Arjuna on the battlefield.

Thus, with their resentments temporarily subdued, these mighty maharathis joined forces, relentlessly grinding down the ranks of the Pandava army. Karna, brimming with ferocity, confronted Arjuna, unleashing a torrent of relentless attacks. The two warriors, bound by the ties of blood, clashed in a storm of weapons and valor. However, it was Arjuna who shattered Karna's chariot and horses, ultimately slaying his charioteer. Left with no other option, Karna sought refuge on Kripa's chariot, his arrogant pride crushed by the relentless assault of Arjuna's divine arsenal.

Meanwhile, Satyaki found himself face to face with Somadatta, Bahlika's son. These two indomitable heroes engaged in a fierce duel, each harboring a fervent desire to see the other's demise. Having already witnessed the fall of his sons, Sala and Bhurishravas, Somadatta was eager to avenge their deaths by clashing with Satyaki. He pierced Satyaki with a volley of ten arrows, his roar echoing across the battlefield. Yet, Satyaki swiftly severed his bow and brought down his horses. With a scorching arrow of radiant brilliance, he pierced the chest of the Kuru general, extinguishing his life force. Somadatta plummeted from his chariot like a fallen demigod, and his terrified troops scattered in disarray. Bhuri, Somadatta's last remaining son, charged at Satyaki, fueled by a burning thirst for revenge. They clashed ferociously, but in the end, Bhuri met his end with a fatal dart piercing his chest.

As the darkness of night enveloped the battlefield, the two armies locked in a relentless struggle. With no discernible distinction between friend and foe, Duryodhana issued the order for torches to be lit. Soon, the entire Kaurava host was bathed in the glow of these torches and lamps, their radiant light illuminating the ferocious clash of warriors. The celestial demigods, with their mystical powers, cast their own radiance upon the heavens, turning the battlefield of Kurukshetra into a mesmerizing spectacle that defied mortal comprehension.

Sahadeva found himself face to face with the formidable Karna, and a battle of titans ensued. Karna, with the memory of his promise to his true mother Kunti in his heart, toyed with Sahadeva like a cat toying with a helpless mouse. The valiant son of Madri retaliated, piercing Karna with a barrage of twenty arrows. Yet, Karna swiftly dispatched Sahadeva's horses and charioteer, leaving him vulnerable.

Undeterred, Sahadeva descended from his chariot, wielding a sword and shield, and charged at Karna with unwavering determination. But the son of Radha shattered his shining sword and shield, the protective bastions of the mighty son of Madri. Sahadeva, undeterred, unleashed a mace, only to have it shattered into fragments by Karna's deadly arrows. Unyielding, Sahadeva unleashed a radiant golden dart with full force, but even that formidable weapon failed to penetrate Karna's defenses.

In a last desperate attempt, Sahadeva hurled chariot wheels, limbs of elephants, dead horses, and lifeless human bodies at his elder brother-turned-foe. Yet, all his makeshift weapons were effortlessly cut to pieces by Karna's relentless barrage of arrows. Left weaponless and outmatched, Sahadeva was forced to retreat from the battle, with Karna close on his heels. Karna, with a touch of condescension, tapped Sahadeva with the horn of his bow, mocking him and saying, "Do not engage in battle with those superior to you, O son of Madri. Face those who are your equals." Laughing mockingly all the while, Karna moved on, leaving Sahadeva alive, though it was well within his power to end his life if he so desired.

Karna continued his onslaught, unleashing his celestial weapons upon the Pandava divisions, wreaking havoc and turning the battlefield into a grotesque tableau of death and destruction. Thousands of men lay slain, their lifeblood staining the earth, forming a macabre river of crimson. Witnessing the devastation wrought upon their troops, Yudhisthira sought out Arjuna and urgently informed him of the dire situation. "Behold, Arjuna,"

he exclaimed, "See the mighty bowman Karna, standing in the distance like Lord Rudra himself. I cannot bear the anguished cries of our soldiers any longer. Go forth, O Phalguna, and fulfill your vow by slaying the Suta's son, Karna, taking the necessary action."

Upon hearing Yudhisthira's command, Arjuna turned to Hrishikesha and spoke with resolve, "Yudhisthira fears for the safety of our army. Karna appears before us like the God of Death, relentless in his mission to vanquish all living beings. O valiant scion of the Vrishni lineage, I shall go forth and either slay him or meet my own demise at his hands."

In response, Lord Krishna, the master of all, offered his sage advice, "O son of Kunti, I perceive Karna covering the battlefield like a celestial warrior. The time is not yet ripe for you to engage in a mighty duel with him. As long as he possesses the divine Shakti weapon bestowed by Indra, he will be a formidable opponent to overcome. Let Ghatotkacha step forward and challenge Karna. He possesses mystical powers and is well-suited to face Radha's son on the battlefield."

Arjuna called upon Ghatotkacha, and the mighty Rakshasa warrior appeared, saluting both Krishna and Dhananjaya, proudly declaring, "Here I am, command me."

Krishna, addressing the son of Hidimva, the Rakshasa with a blazing mouth, fiery eyes, and a body like dark clouds, spoke these words, "Listen, O Ghatotkacha, heed my words. The time has come for you to display your prowess, and no one else. Be the raft that rescues the sinking Pandavas in this battle. You possess various weapons and the illusions of Rakshasas. Behold, O son of Hidimva, Karna is decimating the Pandava army on the battlefield, just like a herdsman herding a helpless cattle. The foremost Kshatriyas among the Pandavas are unable to withstand the onslaught of Karna, who showers them with his relentless arrows. The Panchala warriors are fleeing like startled

deer in the dead of night, tormented by the Suta's son and his arrowy rain. Except for you, O mighty one of terrible prowess, there is no one else who can stand against Karna's onslaught. Aid the Pandavas with your energy and might, O mighty-armed warrior, and accomplish what befits your lineage, your race, and your ancestry. Men desire children precisely for moments like these, to be rescued from dire situations. There is none who can match you in battle. At night, Rakshasas become imbued with boundless power, great strength, and unmatched courage. They become invincible warriors. Slay Karna in battle at this dark hour, utilizing your illusions. Let the Parthas, along with Dhrishtadyumna, deal with Drona."

Ghatotkacha replied, his voice filled with confidence, "I am a match for Karna, as well as for Drona, O Bharata, and any illustrious Kshatriya skilled in weaponry. Tonight, I shall engage in a battle with the Suta's son that will be remembered as long as the world exists. Tonight, I shall spare neither the brave nor the timid nor those who plead for mercy with folded hands. Following Rakshasa customs, I shall slay them all."

The son of Bhima possessed a coppery face and a massive frame. His sunken belly and upward-pointing body hair added to his fearsome appearance. The top of his head was green, and his arrow-like ears stood out. His long tongue protruded from his wide mouth, extending from ear to ear. His teeth were sharp and elongated, and his nose was thick. Adorned with a magnificent crown that arched over his forehead, he wore bright earrings and garlands of flowers intertwined with gold. Opening his wide mouth, he let out a thunderous roar as he advanced towards Karna.

Duryodhana, aware of Ghatotkacha's power and determined to protect his friend Karna, sent the Rakshasa Prince Alamvusha to battle against Ghatotkacha. The two towering demons, both taller than palm trees, clashed with their massive iron clubs. The impact was so powerful that their clubs shattered into pieces, causing shockwaves that knocked down surrounding warriors.

Undeterred, they drew their curved and serrated daggers, engaging in a fierce close-quarters battle, their sharp claws and blades reminiscent of lions or tigers. Eventually, Ghatotkacha's superior strength prevailed, and he wrestled Alamvusha into submission. Pinning him down with his legs and gripping his thick hair, Ghatotkacha severed Alamvusha's head with his knife and raised it triumphantly, roaring like a lion. Carrying the gruesome trophy, Ghatotkacha returned to his chariot and made his way before Duryodhana.

Ghatotkacha roared defiantly, "When one presents oneself before a king, a gift is customary. So, accept this," and with those words, he threw Alamvusha's head onto Duryodhana's chariot, its ugly visage frozen in a grimace of pain and fear. Gazing at Duryodhana, Ghatotkacha continued, "That is my first gift, O king, and there are many more to come. Next, I will present you with the head of your beloved Karna, and afterward, I shall personally rip your heart out and offer it as a gift to my father."

As Ghatotkacha turned his attention towards Karna, a fierce duel ensued between the two warriors. Both were masters of weaponry, and their rage fueled their strikes. They clashed like two enraged elephants vying for a female in heat. Karna unleashed his celestial weapons, while Ghatotkacha relied on his Rakshasa illusions. Surrounding Ghatotkacha were numerous man-eating Rakshasas, growing even more formidable under the cover of night. Together, they charged at Karna, unleashing a barrage of stones and rocks. The supporting soldiers of Karna fled in fear, leaving only Karna to combat the onslaught, utilizing his celestial weapons to dispel the illusion.

Witnessing Karna shatter his illusion, Ghatotkacha grasped a radiant chakra and hurled it with tremendous force. However,

Karna's arrows shattered the blazing weapon mid-flight. Enraged by this, Karna destroyed Ghatotkacha's horses and smashed his chariot. He pierced Bhima's son with a relentless shower of arrows, leaving no space untouched by their deadly tips.

Roaring thunderously, Ghatotkacha summoned thousands upon thousands of arrows to rain down from the sky. He manifested multiple heads that devoured Karna's celestial weapons. At one moment, Bhima's son appeared lifeless on the battlefield, and in the next, he transformed into monstrous forms, towering like mountains. Then, he reduced his form, piercing through the earth. Swiftly, he mounted a golden chariot, traversing the heavens and the earth. Approaching Karna, he taunted, "Stand before me, O son of a charioteer, and satisfy your craving for battle. Today, I shall feast upon your flesh." With a maniacal laugh, the fierce Rakshasa ascended into the sky, conjuring a mountain from which swords, lances, stones, and boulders rained down. Unperturbed, Karna invoked a celestial weapon that dispelled the mystic illusion.

Undeterred, Ghatotkacha conjured a massive rain cloud, causing stones, trees, and lightning bolts to cascade from the sky. Karna invoked the Vayavya weapon, dispersing the colossal cloud. Through Bhima's son's mystic power, Rakshasas appeared everywhere. Some rode atop elephants, others chariots, and some on horses. They filled the earth and the heavens, instilling great fear in the hearts of ordinary men. Ghatotkacha unleashed the Anjalika weapon, shattering Karna's sturdy bow. However, Karna swiftly drew another bow, dispelling the mystic illusion that enshrouded him. Ghatotkacha then wielded the Asani weapon bestowed upon him by Rudra. This celestial weapon bore eight spinning chakras and was the deadliest of all. Descending from his chariot, Bhima's son hurled it at Karna. Yet, Karna descended from his chariot, catching the weapon with ease. He retaliated by hurling it back, obliterating Ghatotkacha's chariot and mules. Karna then pierced Ghatotkacha with a

barrage of arrows, causing him to vanish from sight like smoke dissipating into the sky.

Subsequently, lions, tigers, hyenas, and fiery-tongued snakes, along with birds with iron beaks, materialized on the battlefield. Hideous-faced wolves, leopards, and various other creatures joined their ranks. Ferociously, they advanced toward Karna, hungering to devour him. However, the son of the charioteer impaled those creatures, dispelling the mystic illusion with his mantra-infused weapons.

Ghatotkacha resumed the battle, showering Karna with his mystical powers. Unable to overcome Karna's resilience, he invoked a profoundly powerful weapon. With this weapon, he slew Karna's horses and charioteer, then vanished from sight. All assumed that Karna's demise was imminent. To safeguard his life, Karna filled the sky with his celestial weapons. Silence enveloped the battlefield for a moment as Karna scanned his surroundings, unable to perceive Ghatotkacha's whereabouts. Suddenly, a colossal red cloud materialized in the sky, spewing fire and blazing meteors. Thunder reverberated, shaking the very earth. Fiery weapons rained down from the cloud, hurtling toward Karna. Karna unleashed his divine astras, yet none could vanquish the illusion conjured by Ghatotkacha. Blazing weapons descended upon the Kaurava army, claiming the lives of thousands. Terrified screams echoed through the ranks as the fiery weapons struck the foremost Kaurava leaders. Rakshasas, grotesque and fearsome, emerged from the cloud, devouring the Kaurava troops. From the heavens, axes, lances, stones, boulders, maces, and blazing chakras rained down upon them. All these weapons, ablaze with fire, pierced the bodies and severed the limbs of the Kaurava warriors. The panic-stricken troops fled the battlefield, crying out, "Retreat! Retreat! All is lost! The gods are slaughtering us in defense of the Pandavas!"

Only Karna stood firm, defying the mystic illusion that engulfed the battlefield. But Ghatotkacha, wielding a massive mace adorned with deadly chakras, targeted Karna's four valiant horses. Leaping from his chariot, Karna gazed skyward, perplexed and uncertain. The Kaurava warriors beseeched the Suta's son, "O Karna, swiftly slay the Rakshasa before he annihilates our entire army. Unleash your Shakti weapon bestowed upon you by Indra, the King of Heaven. This mystic illusion shows no mercy, sparing not even those who flee or those defenseless. Without Arjuna, our forces teeter on the brink of destruction."

Amidst the pondering of his dire circumstances, Karna resolved to employ the Shakti weapon. Grasping it from his chariot, he cast his eyes upon the divine weapon, reminiscing how it was granted to him by Indra years ago. He had bartered his golden armor and earrings for its formidable power. Its purpose was to slay Arjuna, and now, with no other recourse to save his beleaguered army, Karna clutched the weapon tightly, preparing to unleash its devastating might. This weapon could be used only once, after which it would return to Indra. With determination, Karna let loose the mighty projectile toward the direction of the mystic illusion. Fierce winds roared, and terror gripped all creatures in the sky. The dart streaked through the heavens, piercing the veil of illusion and striking Ghatotkacha squarely in the chest, extinguishing his life force. Even in his dying moments, Ghatotkacha sought to perform one final act of benevolence for the Pandavas. Channeling his mystic powers, he expanded into a colossal form, hurtling from the heavens and crushing an entire division of troops in his descent.

The Kaurava army erupted in jubilation, approaching the Suta's valiant son to pay homage. The Pandavas, however, were overwhelmed with sorrow upon witnessing the lifeless colossal form of Ghatotkacha. Bhima, shattered by the loss of his son, mourned deeply. Only Lord Krishna exuded elation in this momentous occasion. He resounded with exuberant cries, embracing Arjuna with profound affection. Observing this

outward display of joy amid the demise of a revered hero, Arjuna inquired with curiosity, "O Achyuta, why do you revel when it is an inopportune time? This is a moment for lamentation over the loss of one of our dearest nephews. Please enlighten me on the cause of your buoyancy in the face of a fallen mighty warrior."

"Listen closely, O Dhananjaya!" Lord Vasudeva replied. "I know that Karna can now be vanquished, for he is stripped of the celestial dart. No mortal on Earth could withstand Karna's possession of that weapon. Even with My Sudarshana discus, I could not conquer Karna when armed with the Shakti. Now that he is bereft of that dart, only you can end his life. When you confront him in battle and his chariot wheels become ensnared in the mire, cursed by the brahmana, that is when you shall slay him. In the past, I have brought about the downfall of numerous demonic rulers. Jarasandha, Shishupala, and Ekalavya, the lord of the Nishadas, all met their demise due to My intervention. These kings would assuredly have joined forces with the Kauravas, making victory arduous. Bhima slew Jarasandha, and I severed Shishupala's head during the Rajasuya sacrifice in Indraprastha. Ekalavya, whom neither demigods nor demons could subdue, fell to My hands. Ghatotkacha, too, met his end through Karna's Shakti weapon. Due to My affection for you, I did not slay him earlier. As a Rakshasa, he harbored animosity towards brahmanas and Vaishnavas. If Karna had not killed him, I would have dispatched him myself with My own arsenal. Those who transgress the bounds of righteousness shall meet their demise, either at My hands or through My various energies. Do not fret over Karna's death; it shall come to pass. Bhima, too, will fulfill his vow to slay Duryodhana."

After Ghatotkacha's demise, Yudhisthira sank into his chariot, consumed by grief. In that state, Lord Krishna consoled him, saying, "O son of Kunti, do not lament in this manner. Such sorrow befits not one of noble birth. Rise, O King, and fight. Should the enemy witness you in this state, they shall undoubtedly taste victory."

Yudhisthira replied, "O son of Devaki, when we resided in the forest, Ghatotkacha came to our aid, rendering numerous services. While Arjuna sojourned in the celestial realms, Ghatotkacha stayed by our side, ensuring our protection. On our arduous journeys, he would bear Draupadi upon his back, alleviating her fatigue. My affection for Ghatotkacha exceeds even that for Sahadeva. I held him dear, and he held me in high regard. The death of this sinful Karna shall console my sorrow."

Uttering these words, Yudhisthira surged forward, brimming with fury akin to Yamaraja himself. But as Yudhisthira charged into the fray, Vyasadeva materialized, restraining him from further action. Affectionately, he spoke to Yudhisthira, "Through good fortune, O Yudhisthira, Karna has employed his Shakti weapon in battle. Had this not occurred, Arjuna would surely have perished. How would you have then grieved? Ghatotkacha's demise is for your benefit. Do not mourn, O son of Kunti. Death befalls all creatures in this mortal realm. Ghatotkacha has attained the spiritual realm and earned great renown on the battlefield. In five days' time, this entire Earth shall be yours. With a joyful heart, reunite with your brothers and vanquish your foes." With these words, Vyasadeva vanished from sight.

Chapter 42

The Fifthteenth Day at Kurukshetra

The battlefield was ablaze with energy as the warriors, roused from their brief respite, readied themselves for another round of combat. The moon, casting its ethereal glow upon the scene, illuminated the fierce determination etched on their faces. The soldiers, their fatigue momentarily forgotten, brandished their weapons with renewed vigor, their eyes fixed on the ultimate prize.

But amidst the charged atmosphere, Duryodhana, the wicked king, approached his mentor, Drona, with a venomous tongue. He accused Drona of favoring the Pandavas, of holding back his true power and allowing their enemies to flourish. Duryodhana taunted him, questioning his loyalty and urging him to unleash his celestial weapons and decimate the Pandava army.

Drona, seething with anger at these insolent words, responded with a righteous fury. He rebuked Duryodhana, reminding him of his duty as a warrior and the consequences of wanton destruction. Drona, though capable of invoking devastating astras, expressed his reservations about unleashing them upon defenseless soldiers. He lamented the absence of merit in such indiscriminate slaughter and emphasized the importance of peace of mind over the lust for power.

But pressed by Duryodhana's demands, Drona reluctantly agreed to fulfill his orders. He vowed to slaughter the formidable Panchala warriors, an enemy force that had proven to be a formidable challenge. Drona, however, made it clear that he would relinquish his armor and abandon his mortal body after completing his task. He refused to be a party to the mindless annihilation of helpless soldiers.

Unfazed by Drona's words of wisdom, Duryodhana, filled with arrogance and lacking in foresight, persisted in his belief that Arjuna's energy was limited and that victory was within their grasp. He outlined his plan to confront Krishna and Arjuna, accompanied by Karna, Duhshasana, and Shakuni. Duryodhana envisioned their triumphant clash, the defeat of their adversaries, and the attainment of sovereignty.

Drona, amused by Duryodhana's naive aspirations, laughed at his folly. He reminded the young prince of Arjuna's extraordinary accomplishments and invincibility in battle. Drona recounted the countless foes that Arjuna had vanquished, even triumphing over gods and celestial beings. He scoffed at the idea that mere mortals could best the indomitable Arjuna and warned Duryodhana that his arrogance would lead to his downfall.

With a biting retort, Drona relinquished his responsibility and encouraged Duryodhana to face Arjuna himself. He predicted that Duryodhana, scorched by Arjuna's arrows, would soon come running back, seeking Drona's aid. He taunted Duryodhana, daring him not to flee the battlefield but to confront Arjuna head-on. Drona's words were laced with contempt for the foolish and sinful king.

Emboldened by his mentor's words, Drona's dismissal of his immaturity, Duryodhana, fueled by his misplaced confidence, led the charge alongside Karna, Duhshasana, and Shakuni. They sought to face Krishna and Arjuna directly, convinced of their impending victory. They were oblivious to the impending storm

that awaited them, the relentless barrage of Arjuna's arrows that would leave them pleading for salvation.

And so, as the sun began its ascent, signaling the end of the night, the soldiers paid homage to the celestial deity. Descending from their chariots, horses, and elephants, they bowed before the sun god, offering prayers for strength and protection. The dawn of a new day marked the resumption of their relentless pursuit of victory, their souls aflame with the desire to conquer and triumph.

As the sun ascended in the sky, casting its rays upon the battlefield, the clash between the warriors intensified. Drona, commanding half of the army, unleashed his celestial weapons, wreaking havoc on the enemy ranks. He confronted his arch-enemies, Drupada and Virata, who valiantly fought back, releasing their chosen weapons. But to their dismay, Drona effortlessly rendered their attacks futile, severing their bows and leaving them defenseless.

In a surge of fury, Virata hurled ten lances at Drona, bellowing with rage. Drupada, too, unleashed a dreadful dart that streaked across the sky like a blazing meteor. Yet, Drona shattered their weapons with his own skillful arrows. Seizing the opportunity, he swiftly pierced the chests of both heroes with his broad-headed shafts, snuffing out their lives. Witnessing the fall of their leaders, Dhristadyumna, son of Drupada, pledged to avenge his father's death and vowed to slay Dronacharya before the day's end. Accompanied by a division of troops, he surged forward, determined to fulfill his promise.

Meanwhile, Arjuna engaged in a fierce battle with his mighty preceptor. The spectacle of teacher and student locked in combat captivated all who beheld it. Drona, despite his best efforts, could not gain the upper hand over his skilled disciple. He invoked the Aindra, Pashupati, Tvashtra, Vayavya, and Yamya weapons, only to witness them swiftly destroyed by the mantra-

infused arrows of Arjuna. Impressed by Arjuna's prowess, Drona silently cheered for his beloved student.

The celestial beings and deities watched with bated breath, their eyes fixed on the duel between the two formidable warriors. The heavens resounded with the accolades and praises showered upon both teacher and student. Undeterred, Drona then unleashed the Brahmastra, causing ferocious winds to howl and the earth to tremble in its wake. Yet, Arjuna countered with a Brahma weapon of his own, skillfully withdrawing the clash of the two potent weapons, restoring calm to the tumultuous battleground.

Having momentarily disengaged from Arjuna, Drona turned his attention to annihilating the Panchalas and Shrinjayas. With his superhuman weapons, he unleashed a massacre upon their ranks, displaying no regard for morality as he slaughtered troops who lacked the knowledge to defend themselves against such formidable power. Arjuna, torn by his respect for his preceptor, hesitated to confront him, leaving no one capable of opposing the indomitable hero.

Sensing the urgency of the situation, Lord Krishna devised a plan to bring an end to Drona's rampage. He proposed that they deceive the preceptor by informing him of his son Ashvatthama's death. Krishna suggested that out of affection for his beloved child, Drona would lose his will to fight, thereby safeguarding the lives of countless warriors.

Though Arjuna and Yudhisthira had reservations about this plan, others supported it. Acting swiftly, Bhima sought out and slew a massive elephant named Ashvatthama, belonging to an ally on their side. Approaching Drona, Bhima proclaimed loudly, "Ashvatthama has been slain!" He repeated the news vehemently, emphasizing the demise of his son. Drona's arms weakened, and his weapons slipped from his grasp. Though momentarily confused, Drona's love for his son compelled him to doubt Bhima's words. He recovered his weapons, believing

Bhima to be deceiving him, and resumed his assault on the Panchalas, ruthlessly carving through their front lines.

Drawing upon his formidable arsenal, Drona invoked the Brahma weapon once again, causing devastation on an unimaginable scale. Tens of thousands of men fell victim to its terrible power, and Drona continued his merciless onslaught. Witnessing the preceptor on the battlefield, akin to Yamaraja himself, the demigods and sages observing the carnage beseeched him to cease his unrighteous acts. They reminded Drona of his profound knowledge of the Vedas, urging him not to needlessly slaughter innocent men who were defenseless against his divine weapons. They implored him to relinquish his arms and redirect his mind towards the Supreme Godhead, Narayana, for his destined time on Earth had come to an end. "O Drona," they spoke, "abandon these cruel deeds and seek solace in the divine.

With the sage's words echoing in his mind and the presence of Dhristadyumna before him, Drona felt the flames of battle subside within his heart. Approaching him, Yudhisthira met Drona's gaze and replied truthfully when asked about his son's fate. Drona believed in Yudhisthira's unwavering commitment to truth, even if it meant sacrificing the sovereignty of the universe. Lord Krishna had previously advised the king, saying, "To prevent the army's utter destruction under the onslaught of Drona's celestial weapons, you must resort to a falsehood. In this case, a lie serves a higher purpose than the truth. There shall be no sin in doing so on My behalf. You must follow my instructions with unwavering faith."

Bhima, reinforcing Lord Krishna's counsel, spoke to Yudhisthira, "I have slain a mighty elephant named Ashvatthama, belonging to King Indravarman of the Malavas. I approached Drona and informed him of his son's demise. However, the Preceptor remained unconvinced by my words. But if you, Yudhisthira, proclaim the death of his son, he will lay down his weapons. For the sake of victory, you must heed Krishna's advice."

Reflecting upon the wise counsel of Lord Krishna and Bhima, Yudhisthira approached Drona and declared that his son had indeed been slain, albeit ambiguously mentioning the word "elephant" after his name. As Yudhisthira hesitated to act upon Lord Krishna's command, his chariot, once elevated four fingers above the ground, now descended, touching the earth's surface. Upon hearing the news of his son's demise, Drona's strength waned, and his once formidable celestial weapons ceased to respond to his call. Remembering the sage's profound guidance, he cast aside his weapons and settled into deep meditation. His mind fixated on the Supreme Personality, Lord Krishna, as he withdrew from the fray. Attaining mastery over his yogic practice, Drona peacefully departed from his mortal coil, his passing witnessed by those with spiritual insight.

Seizing the providential moment, Dhristadyumna leapt down from his chariot, brandishing his sword with determination. Though Arjuna called out, pleading for restraint, Dhristadyumna paid little heed to his words. With a fierce resolve, he charged at Drona's chariot, raising his sword high, and in one swift stroke, severed the head of the venerable Preceptor.

Chapter 43

Heavy Words and Great Deeds

Dhristadyumna, fueled by rage and vengeance, lunged onto the chariot, seizing Drona by his formidable dreadlocks. In one swift, merciless stroke, he cleaved off the Preceptor's head, holding it aloft by its thick mane. With a sinister grin, he slammed the severed head onto the blood-soaked earth of the battlefield. The sight was enough to send shivers down the spines of the Kurus who witnessed it, igniting a fear that burned deep within their souls. Panic engulfed them like wildfire, and they fled for their very lives, leaving a trail of dust and desperation in their wake.

Meanwhile, Aswathama, a fearsome figure of immense power and brutality, advanced toward Duryodhana with an air of

ominous foreboding. His towering stature, rivaling even that of Bhima, spoke volumes about his sheer physical prowess. Though he bore the appearance of a Brahmin, his demeanor resembled that of a raging bull. His deep voice boomed through the air, his heavy tread sending tremors across the ground, and his thick neck exuding an aura of raw strength. Clad in red, the garb of a Brahmachari, he smeared his body with vibrant red sandal paste, bearing three fierce lines of red tilak upon his forehead, and his head adorned with mighty dreadlocks. Those who beheld him were filled with dread, wishing to avoid even a mere shadow cast by his imposing presence.

Standing before Duryodhana, Aswathama demanded answers, his eyes burning with an intensity that could pierce the very soul. The great king of Hastinapura, unable to meet his gaze, averted his eyes and instead turned to Kripacharya, Drona's brother, to relay the tale. Kripacharya, Aswathama's uncle through Drona's marriage to Kripi, stepped forward to speak. "They deceived Drona, convincing him of your demise. Overwhelmed by grief upon seeing his beloved father in such despair, Dhristadyumna seized the moment and struck Drona's head from his shoulders. The news of your father's fate caused the entire army to flee in fear."

Aswathama's fury erupted like a volcano, his thunderous roar echoing across the battlefield, freezing the retreating soldiers in their tracks. He leapt off his chariot and began pounding the earth with his feet, leaping and dancing like a man possessed, his lion-like roar resonating through the air. Warriors who had momentarily lost their courage now beheld this enraged hero, his mystical power palpable in the air. The collective flight of the army ceased, for they knew that the wrathful Aswathama, driven by the death of his father, was a force to be reckoned with.

Raising his bow high, Aswathama stood before the assembled heroes, his voice booming like thunder. "My father bestowed upon me a special weapon, the Narayanastra, to be used in times

of dire need. This weapon possesses the potency of Lord Narayana Himself, capable of obliterating our enemies in an instant." Cheers rose from the ranks of his allies, invigorated by the prospect of victory. Aswathama chanted the incantations, invoking the power of the weapon, and unleashed it upon the Pandavas.

Amidst the chaos that ensued after Drona's beheading, Arjuna, the favorite disciple of Dronacharya, could no longer contain his grief. His sorrow poured forth in mournful cries upon the battlefield. The roars of Aswathama reached his ears, and he lamented, "Ashvathama, a formidable warrior skilled in the arts of mystic weapons, shall now unleash his vengeance upon us for the grave sin of slaying our Guru. Alas! We have committed a heinous act, driven by our lust for sovereignty. We shall pay the price for our transgressions. I, who had the utmost respect and love for my preceptor, failed to protect him when he needed me most. The burden of guilt weighs heavy upon me, and I feel as if I have descended into the depths of hell."

Arjuna's heartfelt words hung in the air, the silence punctuated only by the thundering beats of his anguished heart. But it was Bhima, his elder brother, who stepped forward with a stern and resolute voice. "You speak like a recluse dwelling in the wilderness, pouring forth words of self-pity. A Kshatriya's duty is to protect others, and in doing so, he must also safeguard himself from harm. A warrior must exhibit forgiveness and extend protection to women, children, Brahmins, Gurus, and the elderly. You, Arjuna, are the progenitor of a noble lineage of warriors, entrusted with the duties and privileges befitting a Kshatriya. It is unbecoming of you to falter and tremble in the face of an insignificant foe like Ashvathama. Have faith in Lord Krishna, who stands by our side. You are blessed with the might of Indra himself. Do not allow your resolve to waver before our own army. Instead, become an unwavering pillar of strength, guiding our forces toward victory."

Dhristadyumna's voice cut through the tense air, his words dripping with defiance. "You think something dishonorable went down? Ha! I gave Drona more respect than he ever deserved. I flung his sorry head into the dust of Kurukshetra. If it was based on merit, that imposter's noggin would've landed in a pigsty! The gods set forth the duty of a Brahmana, but did he follow it? Nah, he abandoned his sacred path for greed and ambition. He picked up arms and sowed the seeds of his own demise. Don't you see, Arjuna? It was his own damn sins that killed him! And let's not forget how he orchestrated the deceit that led to Abhimanyu's downfall. That was justly repaid, my friend. So, why should we mourn the demise of this so-called Brahmana or Kshatriya? In battle, he treated all acts the same, proper or improper. Such unrighteousness is like poison, and those who know right from wrong call it out. So, Arjuna, why do you reproach me? I've slain that wicked charioteer, and I've got no regrets. If anything, you should be congratulating me!"

Satyaki's blood boiled, his fury ignited by the insults hurled at his beloved Guru Arjuna. "You miserable scoundrel!" he roared, his voice thundering across the battlefield. "Your head and tongue deserve to shatter into a hundred pieces for speaking such blasphemy! By killing your own Guru, you've condemned fifteen generations of your cursed lineage to rot in hell. There's no race more sinful than the Panchalas! Your brother killed Bhisma, and now you've slaughtered Drona. If you keep spewing this filth, I'll crack your skull open with this mace of mine!"

Dhristadyumna's smirk widened, his composure unshaken by Satyaki's threats. "I'll forgive your harsh words, you pitiful fool. Forgiveness is a weakness in the eyes of fools like you. Only a wretch like you would see sin in virtuous actions. Didn't you decapitate Bhurishravas while he was meditating? And yet you have the gall to accuse me? You're nothing but a hypocrite! How can you claim anyone on the Kuru side is innocent? Shalya and his army were stolen from us by an act of Adharma. Subhadra's son was slain through treachery. You speak like an

idealistic child, blind to the reality of this war. Go away and spare me your childish words, or I'll send my arrows straight through your skull!"

Satyaki's rage reached its boiling point. Gripping his mace like a thunderbolt, he charged toward Dhristadyumna, fueled by a tempest of fury. But before he could strike, Bhima, the mighty warrior, intercepted him, his colossal arms restraining Satyaki's wrath with Herculean strength. Undeterred, Dhristadyumna advanced, only to be confronted by Nakula and Sahadeva, standing firm as shields. Despite Bhima's efforts, Satyaki dragged him a few paces, his anger consuming him.

In the midst of the brewing storm, Lord Krishna, the epitome of tranquility, stepped between the combatants. His presence radiated calm, soothing the turbulent waters. With words as sweet as nectar, he urged unity, appealing to their sense of brotherhood and purpose.

But as if the gods themselves intervened, the skies turned dark, billowing clouds swirling ominously. Torrents of rain poured down, but it was no ordinary rain. Hot coals fell from the sky, scorching the earth below. Violent winds whipped through the battlefield, stirring chaos and uncertainty. And on the horizon, a towering wave of fire surged forward, threatening to engulf the Pandava host in a cataclysmic blaze. The forces of nature unleashed their fury, adding a new dimension of danger to an already perilous war.

The battlefield was shrouded in chaos as the generals rushed to Krishna, seeking answers for the imminent threat. With a calm demeanor, Krishna revealed the dreaded truth. "Aswathama has unleashed the Narayanastra, a weapon that spells certain doom for us all," he explained. "But fear not, for I possess the knowledge to neutralize its power. We must cast aside our weapons and armor, lying prone on the ground. Only then will the weapon pass harmlessly over us."

The entire army began to dismount and discard their weaponry, following Krishna's instructions. But amidst the soldiers readying themselves for the defenseless stance, one figure stood firm at the forefront—Bhima. Clad in his armor, his mighty club rested on his shoulder, defying the orders given.

Arjuna approached his brother with urgency. "Hey, Bhima! Get down from there! Remove your armor and drop that club!" he called out, his voice laced with concern.

Bhima surveyed the battlefield, witnessing the onslaught of flaming weapons approaching like a tidal wave. He turned his gaze back to Arjuna and replied with unwavering resolve, "Listen, I'll give you three reasons why I won't do that. First, this weapon, Narayanastra, possesses the same potency as Narayana himself. If it claims my life, I'll attain liberation—moksha. Second, Krishna is my friend, and as you can see, he's all-powerful, the cause of all causes. With him by my side, I have nothing to fear. And lastly, see Duryodhana standing there? I'll be damned if I lay on the ground like a coward in front of him. So, little brother, I'm afraid I cannot comply."

And so, the fearsome weapon hurtled toward Bhima, its full force concentrated on him alone. But he stood there, unyielding, with his arms crossed and his faith unshakable. The flames singed his eyebrows, and with a snort of defiance, he remained unscathed. The weapon, unable to touch him, vanished into thin air.

Beholding the pacification of the Narayanastra, the Pandavas regrouped, ready for battle once more. Duryodhana hurried to Ashvatthama, beseeching him, "O great Brahmana, unleash that weapon once more! The Pandavas are preparing for victory!"

But Ashvatthama replied, "O King, that weapon cannot be invoked again. If attempted, it will undoubtedly slay the one who wields it. Vasudeva, Krishna, has thwarted its power. However, fear not, for I shall employ my other formidable weapons to slaughter the Pandava host."

With fierce determination, Ashvatthama charged at Dhristadyumna, swiftly killing his horses and charioteer. Dhristadyumna, undeterred, leaped off his chariot, sword in hand, only to be pinned to the side of his chariot by a barrage of arrows. All seemed lost, except for Satyaki, whose animosity faded in the face of the common enemy. Filled with rage, he mounted his chariot, rescued Dhristadyumna, and valiantly fought back, forcing Ashvatthama to retreat.

Witnessing the relentless assault, Ashvatthama invoked the Agneya weapon, unleashing a storm of fiery arrows upon the Pandava soldiers. The flames ravaged their bodies, leaving a trail of destruction. Not content with his onslaught, Ashvatthama directed his attack toward Krishna and Arjuna, aiming to decimate their chariot. The Agneya weapon claimed the lives of countless chariot warriors, elephants, and horsemen, akin to a merciless forest fire consuming trees. To safeguard the army, Arjuna invoked the Brahmastra, countering Ashvatthama's destructive assault.

In the midst of the inferno, Ashvatthama beheld a colossal figure standing before the chariot—a sight that sent shivers down his spine. The being had three fierce red eyes, draped in a bloody tiger skin, with pitch-black skin and a trident in hand. As both weapons were withdrawn, the scorched soldiers surveyed the aftermath, unable to distinguish friend from foe. Both armies, thinking Krishna and Arjuna had perished, erupted in cheer and blew their conch shells.

Witnessing the unscathed Arjuna and Krishna, the Kaurava warriors sank into desolation, seeking solace within their tents as night fell.

Overwhelmed by the failure of his astra, Ashvatthama found himself at a loss. Descending from his chariot, he turned and fled from the battle, evading the consequences of his actions.

Chapter 44

The Sixteenth Day

Dhritarastra's voice quivered with fear as he addressed Sanjaya, desperate for news. "O Sanjaya, my heart trembles at the news of Drona's demise. One by one, the mighty warriors of the Kaurava army are being swallowed by the overwhelming ocean of the Pandavas. With my son's deceitful ways, I fear that none of our great kings will survive. Tell me, O Suta, who took command of our forces after the fall of our revered preceptor?"

Sanjaya, the ever-loyal advisor, responded with unwavering dedication. "O King, after the withdrawal of forces on the fifteenth day of battle, Duryodhana called for a meeting with his

generals to discuss the appointment of the next commander. Each offered their opinion, but it was Ashvatthama who spoke with conviction. He reminded them not to despair at the loss of warriors, for destiny alone would decide the victor of this war. Ashvatthama proposed that Karna, with his unmatched skill in weaponry and invincibility, should lead the Kaurava army to triumph. His power rivals that of Yamaraja himself, and he will surely vanquish our enemies." Agreeing to Ashvatthama's proposal, Duryodhana appointed Karna as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava forces.

As the dawn of the sixteenth day arrived, both armies assembled their troops, ready for the impending clash. The air reverberated with the sounds of conches, drums, and trumpets, a prelude to the fierce battle that awaited them. Leading the Kaurava army was Karna, while Arjuna and King Yudhisthira commanded the Pandava forces.

In the tumultuous clash of weapons, Bhima, mounted on a majestic elephant, launched iron lances upon the enemy, striking fear into their hearts. He confronted the King of the Kulutas, who also rode atop an elephant. They engaged in a brutal exchange, their weapons causing mutual harm. Bhima, undeterred by the six lances piercing his body, leaped from his elephant and crushed the opponent's elephant with a single blow. The King of the Kulutas, dismounting from the fallen beast, rushed at Bhima with a raised sword. But Bhima, wielding his mighty mace, sent the king to his ultimate demise.

Meanwhile, Arjuna found himself face-to-face with the wrathful son of Drona. The two warriors clashed fiercely, resulting in the death of Ashvatthama's charioteer and his subsequent retreat from the battlefield, wounded by Arjuna's relentless arrows. Arjuna then turned his attention to the remaining Samsaptakas, led by King Susharman, engaging them in a heated battle.

In another part of the battlefield, Sahadeva confronted Duhshasana, overpowering him with skill and strength.

Crushing the countless troops supporting the sinful brother of Duryodhana, Sahadeva showcased his valor and determination.

Amidst the chaos and bloodshed of the sixteenth day, Ashvatthama crossed paths with King Pandya, raining arrows upon the Kaurava host, inflicting heavy casualties. King Pandya, renowned for his fighting prowess, invoked celestial weapons, invoking the Vayavya weapon to deflect the onslaught of Ashvatthama's arrows. Enraged by the king's success, Ashvatthama killed his horses and charioteer, shattering his chariot into pieces. But King Pandya, refusing to yield, leaped from the wreckage and mounted a wild elephant that roamed the battlefield riderless. With a golden lance in hand, he hurled it at Ashvatthama with all his might, proclaiming, "You are slain! You are slain!" The forceful lance shattered Ashvatthama's radiant crown adorned with precious jewels. Overwhelmed by the loss of his cherished crown, Ashvatthama unleashed three crescent-shaped arrows, severing the two arms and the head of the valiant warrior. King Pandya, torn into four pieces, fell from the elephant and lay lifeless on the ground.

The sixteenth day of the battle witnessed Sahadeva's triumph over Duhshasana, as he crushed the countless troops supporting the sinful Kaurava brother, displaying his unwavering determination and indomitable spirit.

In the blistering heat of battle, Nakula, with fiery determination, decimated the Kaurava divisions. But Karna, the formidable warrior, emerged to challenge him, a wicked grin on his face. Nakula, undeterred, taunted him with scorn, "Ah, the root cause of this wretched war stands before me today! By Providence's grace, I have the chance to face you. Slaying you here and now, I shall consider my objective achieved."

"Come, hero, and prove your mettle," Karna retorted, his voice laced with confidence. "You think yourself powerful, having

achieved a few meager feats in battle. Today, I shall crush your pride with my mighty arrows."

With those words hanging in the air, Karna unleashed a volley of seventy arrows, aiming to overpower Nakula. But the son of Madri, displaying his exceptional skill, swiftly countered those arrows and retaliated with eighty arrows of his own. Nakula shattered Karna's bow, and with a broad-headed shaft, Karna killed Nakula's charioteer. Four more arrows claimed the lives of Nakula's noble steeds, forcing him to abandon his chariot and take up a spiked bludgeon in hand. He hurled the weapon with all his might, only to see it deflected by Karna's expert marksmanship. Realizing the futility of his actions, Nakula fled to another part of the battlefield, pursued relentlessly by Karna. Cornered by his relentless adversary, Nakula's spirit wilted as Karna, with a touch of his bow's horn, taunted him, "Your boasts have proven hollow. Dare you repeat them now? Do not engage with those superior to you, O son of Pandu. Seek refuge with Krishna and Arjuna." Karna, bound by his promise to Kunti, refrained from killing Nakula, who, spared from the clutches of death, slunk away in shame, his head hung low.

In the midst of this turmoil, King Yudhisthira encountered King Duryodhana, their animosity aflame. A fierce duel ensued, shaking the very foundations of the battlefield. Duryodhana, desperate to turn the tide in his favor, hurled a golden dart at Yudhisthira, its velocity matching that of a shooting star. But Yudhisthira shattered the weapon, retaliating by piercing Duryodhana with a barrage of arrows. Duryodhana, his rage unquenched, unleashed a thunderous volley, showering Yudhisthira with a hailstorm of hundreds of arrows. Yet, Yudhisthira, undeterred, aimed a golden-shafted arrow that pierced Gandhari's son, plunging deep into the earth. Temporarily unconscious, Duryodhana slumped in his chariot. When he regained his senses, fueled by an unyielding determination, he gripped his mace and charged at Yudhisthira, intent on ending his life. Sensing the peril, Bhima, bound by his vow made during the gambling match, reminded Yudhisthira,

"This one should not be slain by you, O King." With those words resonating in his mind, Yudhisthira refrained from killing the sinful cause of the annihilation of the entire Kshatriya race.

And so, the unstoppable force of Arjuna emerged, wreaking havoc upon the Kaurava army. With his mighty arsenal, he unleashed a storm of destruction, turning the Kurukshetra plain into a sea of carnage. Corpses of warriors, elephants, and horses littered the battlefield in every direction. The ground was strewn with broken axes, scimitars, maces, javelins, and darts. Heads, arms, and legs were severed and scattered, reminiscent of Yamaraja's grim realm, where the wicked faced their due punishment. The battlefield, to the weak-hearted, appeared as a grotesque spectacle, while to the valiant heroes who reveled in combat, it resembled an entrance to the realm of the divine. And so, the relentless clash continued until the sun dipped below the horizon, signaling the end of the sixteenth day of this monumental war. With that, both armies withdrew to their camps, regrouping and preparing for the relentless conflict that lay ahead.

Chapter 45

Salya Becomes Karna's Charioteer

King Dhritarastra leaned forward, his voice tinged with both curiosity and apprehension. "Sanjaya, tell me of the seventeenth day, when Duryodhana, relying on the might of Karna, faced the daunting challenge of Arjuna. Fate, it seems, holds sway over us all, as my sons now taste the bitter fruit of their actions—the annihilation of their own kin and friends. Spare no detail, for I crave to know all that transpired on that fateful day."

Sanjaya, the faithful advisor, took a deep breath before commencing his account. "As the sun's golden rays pierced the darkness, illuminating the battlefield, Karna sought out King Duryodhana. With unwavering resolve, he spoke, his words laced with determination. 'Today, O King, I shall engage Arjuna in battle. Either I shall slay him, or he shall slay me. I will not return from this field without vanquishing him. Although deprived of the mighty Shakti weapon, I request your attention to a plan that will aid me in securing victory. My celestial weapons are no less potent than Arjuna's. When it comes to countering formidable foes, I surpass him. In terms of dexterity, range, accuracy, and skill, I am his superior. My bow, Vijaya, fashioned by the divine architect Vishvakarma for Indra, bestowed upon my preceptor, Parashurama, is mightier than the

renowned Gandiva. Parashurama himself has wielded this bow to eradicate the Kshatriyas twenty-one times. Armed with this celestial weapon, I shall face Arjuna today, and I shall succeed. He shall crumble before me as I unleash my chosen arsenal.'

"Yet, let me acknowledge the areas where Arjuna surpasses me," Karna continued, recognizing his opponent's strengths. "The charioteer of Arjuna is none other than Krishna, the divine son of Devaki. He is revered in all three worlds, and his celestial chariot, bestowed by Agni, is impervious to any weapon. His horses, swifter than thought, cannot be slain. Arjuna possesses inexhaustible quivers and a bowstring of celestial origin. And let us not forget the remarkable ape adorning Arjuna's banner. Though I may lack in these aspects, I shall still confront him. If only I could acquire a charioteer equal to Krishna, then assuredly victory would be mine. I believe Salya, the King of Madras, possesses the skills that match Krishna's. Just as Krishna is adept in equestrian arts, so is Salya. Salya surpasses Krishna, and I surpass Arjuna. I beseech you, provide me with numerous carts filled with weapons at my disposal. Thus armed, I shall surpass Arjuna. If you can fulfill these requests, victory shall be yours."

Duryodhana, resolute and loyal to his ally, responded assuredly, "I shall supply you with the weapons you seek. I shall personally accompany you, protecting you on all sides as you face Arjuna. Now, I shall approach Salya and beseech him to take the reins of your chariot, leading you to triumph."

Sanjaya's narrative flowed seamlessly as he continued. "O Monarch," Duryodhana implored the mighty ruler of Madras, "I seek your aid. To aid Karna in his quest to slay Arjuna, I beseech you to become his charioteer, guiding him towards victory. O great warrior, you possess the prowess equal to Vasudeva himself. Just as the divine Krishna safeguards Arjuna, so must you protect Karna. The Pandavas have decimated my forces, and my army teeters on the brink of destruction. Karna yearns to confront Arjuna, but he requires a charioteer on par

with Krishna. If you, who surpass Krishna, take the reins of Karna's chariot, then victory shall be his. With Arjuna's demise, the entire Pandava army will crumble effortlessly. O invincible monarch, if you join forces with the son of Radha, not even the united demigods shall pose a threat. I seek your refuge, as the demigods seek the sanctuary of Lord Vishnu. Assist the son of the Suta, and aid me in attaining complete dominion over this earthly realm."

"O son of Gandhari," Salya retorted, his voice brimming with indignation, "you dare insult me by suggesting that someone you consider superior to me should be my charioteer? I do not consider the son of Radha my equal. Look at these colossal arms, strong as thunderbolts! Observe my bow, capable of conquering all men on the battlefield. Behold my chariot and horses, swifter than the wind itself. Do you not see my mace, gilded with gold? With this weapon, I can cleave the earth or shatter mountains into pieces. The Supreme Being created the Kshatriyas from His own arms, and I have undergone the ceremonies befitting a king. I deserve the praise and reverence due to a ruler. I will not fight under such humiliating circumstances. I seek your permission to return to my kingdom."

Sanjaya's narration continued, "As Salya, a lion among men, expressed his heartfelt sentiments, he made to leave the assembly of kings. But Duryodhana, catching hold of him, spoke affectionately, seeking to reassure him. 'Fear not, Salya,' he implored, 'what you have said is true. Karna is not superior to you, and I never intended to humiliate you in the presence of these mighty warriors. I have a specific purpose in mind. Karna surpasses Arjuna in wielding weapons, and you surpass Krishna in horsemanship. Krishna, the foremost of warriors, himself drives Arjuna's chariot. You, being twice as superior as Krishna and a skilled adhiratha, have no reason to feel humiliated in driving Karna's chariot. It is a matter of glory and victory for you.'

"Having been assured by Duryodhana's words, Salya responded, 'Since you have recognized my superiority over Krishna, I am pleased. I shall take the reins of Karna's chariot under the condition that he must tolerate whatever I say.'

"Agreeing to Salya's conditions, Karna then focused his mind on the forthcoming battle. With Salya by his side, he ascended his chariot, while the assembly of warriors extolled the formidable duo. Drums and cymbals resounded, and conch shells echoed in the air as Karna and Salya arrived at the frontline of the battlefield. The Kaurava soldiers rejoiced at this mighty alliance, oblivious to the sinister omens that enveloped them. Meteor showers cascaded from the heavens, thunder and lightning crackled across the cloudless sky. Bones descended from the firmament, and fierce winds howled ominously. Unaware of the portents of doom, they succumbed to the grip of time, unaware that their fate spelled death.

"Enveloped in a sense of impending victory, Karna began to boast, 'From the vantage point of my chariot, I can challenge even Indra, the king of heaven himself. As I gaze upon Bhishma and Drona, fallen on the battlefield, I feel no fear. I know that it falls upon me to face Arjuna and slay him in combat. Bhishma and Drona were too fond of Arjuna, preventing them from harboring the intent to kill him. But I lack such sentiment toward Partha. Destiny has decreed that it is I who shall bring about Arjuna's demise. Behold, Salya, this chariot adorned with tiger skins and gleaming with gold. It is drawn by the finest horses bestowed upon me by my preceptor, Parashurama. It carries an array of weapons unparalleled for slaying the enemy in combat. Even if the demigods unite with Partha, they shall not hinder me in fulfilling my oath to slay Arjuna.'

"Sanjaya's narration continued, 'Hearing Karna's arrogant words, Salya offered a fitting reply, "O Karna, spare my ears the grating cacophony of your conceited vanity. Arjuna is the foremost warrior, while you are but the lowest of Kshatriyas. Who other than Arjuna could have abducted Subhadra, right under the

noses of all the Yadu princes and kings? Who, except Arjuna, could have satisfied the mighty Lord Shiva in battle? When it came to protecting the Khandava forest and assisting Agni, who but Arjuna could have battled all the heavenly gods, led by Indra, and emerged victorious? Was it not Phalguna who rescued Duryodhana from the clutches of the Gandharvas after you had fled from the battlefield? When the cows were stolen from the kingdom of Virata, was it not Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Ashvatthama, Duryodhana, and even yourself who were defeated by Arjuna? Why did you not strive to defeat him then? Now, on this occasion, you shall have another chance to face the son of Kunti, and mark my words, if you do not flee from battle, Arjuna shall slay you.'

"Karna retorted, 'You are undoubtedly an enemy masquerading as a friend. Why do you seek to discourage me before I face Arjuna in battle? No one, not even Indra, let alone a mere mortal, shall dissuade me from my determination to kill Arjuna.'

"Salya responded with resolve, 'When you stand face to face with Arjuna and feel the might of his arrows, you shall retract your boastful declarations. You are like a croaking frog, inviting the black snake of Krishna to devour you. You are like a dog in the forest, barking at a tiger on the prowl. You are but a jackal, and Dhananjaya is a mighty lion. You may flaunt these words until Arjuna severs your head with his golden-shafted arrows.'"

In the midst of the chaotic battlefield, the clash of steel and the cries of warriors filled the air. The combatants were locked in a deadly dance of valor and vengeance, their weapons flashing like bolts of lightning. Karna, fueled by his anger and the desire for victory, fought with the strength of a hundred men.

Dhristadyumna, the valiant commander of the Pandava forces, led the charge against Karna. Satyaki, the indomitable warrior, unleashed his fury alongside him. The five sons of Draupadi, born of fire and destined for greatness, struck fear into the hearts of their enemies. Bhima, the mighty and unstoppable, roared

with fury as he sought to avenge the wrongs done to his beloved wife Draupadi.

Amidst the chaos, Shikhandi, who had once been a princess but now stood as a formidable warrior, attacked Karna with all his might. His arrows pierced the air, seeking to find their mark on the Suta's son. Nakula and Sahadeva, the twin brothers, fought with grace and precision, cutting down Karna's supporting troops one by one.

But Karna was not one to be easily defeated. His skill with the bow was unmatched, and he fought with the determination of a wounded lion. With each arrow he unleashed, he sought to strike down his foes and prove his superiority. His sons, Satyasena and Sushena, shielded him from behind, ready to sacrifice their lives for their father.

Bhima, his blood boiling with rage, took aim at Karna's chariot wheels. He released a volley of arrows that cut through the air like a storm, severing the spokes and sending the chariot crashing to the ground. Undeterred, Karna swiftly mounted another chariot, determined to continue the fight.

The battlefield became a canvas of chaos and carnage as the clash between Karna and the Pandavas intensified. The ground shook with the impact of their blows, and the heavens themselves seemed to tremble in response. Each warrior fought with the strength of ten, their bodies drenched in sweat and their hearts filled with the fire of battle.

Amidst the fury of the clash, the sun began its descent toward the horizon, casting a golden glow over the blood-soaked field. The day wore on, and both sides showed no signs of yielding. Karna, fueled by his undying pride and the desire to fulfill his oath, fought on, his eyes fixed on his ultimate target—Arjuna.

As dusk settled over the battlefield, the outcome of this fierce encounter remained uncertain. The clash between Karna and the Pandavas had only just begun, and the true test of their strength

and valor was yet to come. The fate of nations hung in the balance, and the gods themselves watched with bated breath, waiting to see who would emerge victorious from this epic struggle.

In the heart of the raging battlefield, Karna, the formidable warrior, clashed with Yudhisthira, the righteous king. Arrows flew like deadly serpents, seeking to claim the lives of their adversaries. Karna, with his unmatched skill, pierced Yudhisthira with ten arrows, causing him to reel in pain.

But Yudhisthira, fueled by his determination and the weight of his responsibilities, summoned his last reserves of strength. With a golden arrow fitted to his bow, he took aim at Karna, his eyes burning with a fiery resolve. The arrow, like a streak of lightning, found its mark, striking Karna's side and bringing him to his knees.

The sight of Karna falling sent shockwaves through his division, and they believed their beloved warrior had met his end. Salya, ever the loyal comrade, prepared to rescue Karna from the clutches of death. But to their surprise, Karna regained consciousness, his indomitable spirit refusing to yield.

With renewed determination, Karna focused his attention on Yudhisthira. He unleashed a volley of razor-headed arrows that cut down the brave warriors protecting Yudhisthira's chariot. His arrows sliced through Yudhisthira's armor, leaving him vulnerable and exposed. Yudhisthira, undeterred, grasped a golden dart and launched it with all his might at Karna, hoping to turn the tide of battle.

Yet, Karna, like a titan of war, shattered the dart with his own formidable arsenal. Undeterred by the assault, Karna pierced Yudhisthira with four lances, each finding its mark with deadly precision. Blood flowed from Karna's wounds, and his fury blazed like a wild inferno.

In a relentless display of power, Karna shattered Yudhisthira's chariot, forcing the valiant king to ascend another. But Yudhisthira, feeling the weight of the battle and unsure of his own ability to continue, made the difficult choice to retreat from the battlefield. However, Karna, his pride aflame, would not let him escape so easily. He seized Yudhisthira forcefully, reminding him of his noble lineage and mocking his perceived lack of warrior spirit.

But in that moment, Karna's memory was stirred, remembering the promise he had made to Kunti, Yudhisthira's mother. He held true to his word and spared Yudhisthira's life, albeit with a mocking laugh and sharp words of admonishment.

As Karna turned away, his attention shifted to the chaotic battlefield. Bhima, the embodiment of strength and wrath, engaged him in a fierce duel. The clash of their weapons reverberated through the air, each blow carrying the weight of their burning animosity.

Karna managed to shatter Bhima's bow, but the resilient warrior swiftly strung another and unleashed a barrage of arrows upon Karna. The arrows found their mark, piercing Karna's chest with the force of lightning. Overwhelmed by the impact, Karna fell into a deadly swoon, his life hanging by a thread.

Salya, the steadfast ally, swiftly intervened, rescuing Karna from the jaws of death. Meanwhile, Duryodhana, unwilling to witness the defeat of his beloved warrior, sent twenty of his brothers to challenge Bhima. But they were mere ants before a raging fire, and Bhima, his rage consuming him, dispatched them without mercy.

Bhima, his thirst for vengeance unquenched, descended from his chariot and unleashed his wrath upon the enemy forces. He mowed down soldiers like a scythe through wheat, his mace becoming an instrument of annihilation. Elephants charged, intending to trample him, but Bhima laid them low with his unyielding might.

The Kaurava army, witnessing the devastation wrought by Bhima, trembled in fear and sought solace in Karna's protection. But Bhima, unrelenting, continued his relentless assault. Chariots crumbled, horses and warriors fell, and the battlefield transformed into a gruesome tableau of death.

Bhima, fueled by his love for Draupadi and his burning desire for retribution, unleashed his wrath upon the sinners who dared to harm his beloved. Covered in blood and surrounded by the carnage he had wrought, Bhima stood as a manifestation of divine retribution, his indomitable spirit unbroken.

The battlefield of Kurukshetra bore witness to the clash of titans, each warrior driven by their own motives, their destinies intertwined in a tapestry of bloodshed and valor. The outcome of this epic struggle remained uncertain, as the gods themselves watched with bated breath, awaiting the final verdict of fate.

Chapter 46

Lord Krishna Saves Yudhisthira from Death

Dhritarastra's voice boomed with anticipation as he implored Sanjaya to recount the epic clash between Arjuna and Karna, the foremost chariot fighters of their time. The battle was fierce, and the king hungered for every detail.

Sanjaya, his voice filled with excitement, described the chaos that unfolded on the seventeenth day of the war. Arjuna, wielding his mighty Gandiva bow, was engaged in a relentless slaughter of the Samsaptaka warriors led by King Susharman.

The clash of weapons and the thunderous roars of battle reverberated through the air.

The Samsaptakas, fueled by their anger, surrounded Arjuna's chariot and unleashed a torrential storm of weapons upon him. King Susharman, with his deadly accuracy, pierced Arjuna with ten arrows and Krishna with three, seeking to bring them to their knees. Not even the valiant monkey Hanuman, emblazoned on Arjuna's banner, was spared as he let out earth-shaking screams.

But Hanuman, unwilling to tolerate such an assault, responded with a thunderous roar that left the Samsaptaka warriors petrified in fear. They stood motionless, like trees in a dense forest, their courage shattered. Undeterred, King Susharman, stoking the fire of his troops, charged at Krishna and Arjuna, raining down his formidable arsenal.

The Samsaptakas, driven by intense anger, assaulted Arjuna's divine chariot, hacking at its wheels, shaft, horses, and every vulnerable spot. Some warriors sought to seize Krishna, while others aimed to strike Arjuna with their lethal weapons. But the lotus-eyed Krishna, with unmatched strength, pushed aside those who dared to harm him, while Arjuna, in close-quarter combat, dispatched the soldiers with short arrows, severing their limbs and heads with brutal precision.

Arjuna, addressing Krishna, proudly pointed out the fierce Samsaptakas and declared that none but himself could withstand such a relentless onslaught. Blowing his conchshell, the Devadatta, and accompanied by Krishna's resounding Panchajanya, Arjuna invoked the Naga weapon, immobilizing the Samsaptaka army. Helpless, they fell prey to Arjuna's wrath, as he cut them down like a tempest felling trees.

However, King Susharman, seeing his troops trapped by the Naga weapon, unleashed the Sauparna astra, summoning countless birds to devour the serpents. Liberated from their bonds, the Samsaptakas unleashed a barrage of arrows and weapons upon Krishna and Arjuna. King Susharman, with

deadly precision, released an arrow that pierced Arjuna's chest, causing him to collapse onto the chariot's floor.

The Samsaptakas, witnessing Arjuna's fall, erupted in triumph, crying out, "Arjuna is slain! Arjuna is slain!" Drums beat, and conchshells blared as they charged toward Krishna and Arjuna's chariot. But Arjuna, regaining his senses and witnessing the approaching enemy, invoked the Aindra weapon. From a single arrow, thousands upon thousands of arrows shot forth from his mighty Gandiva bow, striking down soldiers, horses, and elephants like lightning bolts wreaking havoc.

Within moments, seventeen thousand warriors and three thousand elephants lay strewn across the battlefield, casualties of Arjuna's unstoppable fury. Yet, those Samsaptaka warriors who remained undeterred continued their relentless assault on Arjuna, driven by a thirst for victory or death.

Sanjaya's tale continued, shifting focus to Yudhisthira's battle with Duryodhana. Sahadeva and Nakula, loyal to their eldest brother, guarded Yudhisthira's chariot wheels and joined him in combating the Kaurava king. Sahadeva, invoking a celestial weapon, showered Duryodhana with a barrage of arrows, causing deep wounds that endangered the Kaurava king. In retaliation, Duryodhana unleashed his own arrows, inflicting pain upon the sons of Pandu.

Not tolerating the sight of his beloved brother's suffering, Karna entered the fray. He relentlessly tore through the troops supporting Yudhisthira, piercing him with a flurry of arrows. Yudhisthira, undeterred, countered with fifty arrows of his own, inflicting wounds upon Karna. The valiant king then turned his attention to the Kaurava army, unleashing his mighty weapons that forced them to retreat.

However, inflamed with rage, Karna launched a fierce assault on Yudhisthira, lacerating him with his formidable weaponry. The Kaurava army, witnessing their opportunity, cried out, "Seize him! Seize him!" But Yudhisthira found protection in the

valiant Kekaya soldiers, who pushed back the enemy's frontline with unwavering resolve.

The battlefield of Kurukshetra trembled under the weight of these epic encounters, as heroes clashed and destiny unfolded amidst a sea of bloodshed. The war raged on, leaving an indelible mark on history, and the gods themselves watched in awe and anticipation, awaiting the final chapter of this epic saga.

Karna's relentless pursuit of Yudhisthira showed no signs of abating. The wounded king, mangled by Karna's arrows, sought solace in his tent, accompanied by his loyal protectors, Nakula and Sahadeva. But Karna was relentless, closing in on them swiftly. With a swift and deadly precision, he pierced Yudhisthira with three arrows, further deepening the wounds inflicted upon the noble king.

Sahadeva and Nakula, driven by their loyalty and fury, turned to face Karna, launching a relentless assault upon him. Their arrows filled the air, seeking to subdue their foe. Yet, despite their valiant efforts, Karna managed to strike a fatal blow by killing the horses that drew Yudhisthira's chariot. A wicked smile adorned Karna's face as he unleashed a single arrow, knocking the crown from Yudhisthira's head, stripping him of his regal dignity. With merciless precision, Karna then killed Nakula's horses and shattered his bow, leaving him defenseless.

Undeterred, Nakula ascended Sahadeva's chariot, determined to continue the fight against the cruel Karna. However, Salya, realizing the futility of the battle with Yudhisthira, approached Karna and questioned the purpose of engaging in such a useless conflict. He urged Karna to focus his attention on the true adversary, Arjuna, who was wreaking havoc on the Kaurava warriors. Salya reminded Karna of the imminent danger posed

by Arjuna and the need to protect Duryodhana, who was struggling against Bhima on the battlefield.

Moved by Salya's words and witnessing Duryodhana's plight, Karna heeded the advice and ordered his chariot to be brought to the front lines. Yudhisthira, relieved from Karna's relentless assault, ascended Sahadeva's chariot and returned to his camp, nursing his wounds and nursing his wounded pride. Seeking rest and solace, he entered his tent, where Nakula and Sahadeva painstakingly removed Karna's arrows. Exhausted, he laid down on his bed, instructing his brothers to go and aid Bhima in battle.

Meanwhile, amidst the chaotic battlefield, Arjuna engaged in a fierce duel with Ashvatthama, ultimately forcing him to retreat. However, when Arjuna scanned the tumultuous scene, he noticed the absence of Yudhisthira's royal banner. Concerned, he turned to Bhima and inquired about the whereabouts of their noble king. Bhima somberly revealed that Yudhisthira had left the battlefield, his body scorched by Karna's arrows, leaving his survival uncertain.

Determined to find Yudhisthira and ascertain his condition, Arjuna urged Lord Krishna to drive their chariot to the camp. Entering Yudhisthira's tent, relief washed over them as they discovered the king still alive. Overwhelmed with joy, Krishna and Arjuna reverently worshipped Yudhisthira's feet and inquired about his well-being. Yudhisthira, assuming that Arjuna had slain Karna, warmly greeted them and expressed his gratitude. He believed that Karna's defeat was the reason for their presence and eagerly awaited the tale of that mighty hero's demise.

In response to the king's inquiry, Arjuna, known as Jishnu, began his account. He revealed his recent triumph over Drona's son in battle and the subsequent defeat of the Samsaptaka warriors. Arjuna admitted that he had rushed to see Yudhisthira, unsure of his fate after the intense duel with Karna. Arjuna shared the dire news of Karna's relentless slaughter of their

troops, fueled by the power of the formidable Bhargava weapon. He recounted how Karna had already slain seventeen hundred of their bravest princes. With steely determination, Arjuna implored Yudhisthira to accompany him, vowing to vanquish Karna, his kinsmen, and his followers, thereby avenging the fallen warriors. The stage was set for a final showdown between these legendary warriors, where destiny would determine the victor and the course of the great war.

the tension between Yudhisthira and Arjuna reached its peak as Yudhisthira, agitated by the news of Karna's continued onslaught, lashed out at his brother. His words dripped with frustration and accusation, "The army is being devoured by Karna, and you have come here deserting the brave Bhima on the front line of battle. You have promised to kill Karna. Therefore, why have you come here, except out of fear of the enemy? If, in the Dvaitavana forest, you had said to me that you would not fight with Karna, then I would have made other arrangements. You possess all abilities to slay the Suta's son, yet, out of fear you do not use them. If you had given the Gandiva bow to Keshava, and you had driven the chariot, then certainly He would have slain Karna by now. If you are unable to defeat Karna, then you should give the Gandiva bow to a superior king and allow him to slay Karna. Because of this cowardly act, it would have been better if you were never born in Kunti's womb."

Yudhisthira's words struck a nerve in Arjuna, and his anger flared. In a fit of rage, he drew his sword, ready to strike down his own brother. However, Krishna swiftly intervened, calming Arjuna and quelling his fury. The divine Lord, with his soothing words, pacified his friend and reminded him of his vow to slay Karna, urging him to focus on the battle at hand.

Lord Krishna's calming presence gave Arjuna pause, and he spoke, his voice filled with a mix of resentment and

determination, "I have taken a secret vow, O Govinda, that anyone who suggests that I give my Gandiva bow to another king should be slain. To keep my vow, I will now kill this brother who faults me for falling from virtue."

The lotus-eyed Lord Krishna, in his infinite wisdom, replied to Arjuna, shedding light on the situation, "Why, O Partha, are you drawing your sword? I do not see, O Dhananjaya, anyone here whom you should fight with. We should now go to the front line of the battle and fight with Dhritarastra's sons or the mighty Karna, whom you have vowed to slay."

Krishna's words resonated with Arjuna, and he realized the gravity of his impulsive anger. He recounted a story to illustrate the importance of discerning right from wrong, explaining that morality should be guided by scripture and the wisdom of saintly persons. Arjuna realized that killing his own elder brother was not sanctioned by scripture and would only lead to sin.

Acknowledging the weight of his vow and seeking a way out of the predicament, Arjuna implored Krishna for guidance. Krishna, the compassionate friend and advisor, revealed a solution. He proposed a plan where Yudhisthira would be thought of as dead but his physical body would remain unharmed. By speaking harshly to Yudhisthira, Arjuna would fulfill his vow without actually taking his life. Krishna assured Arjuna that this course of action would alleviate his dilemma and allow him to focus on defeating Karna.

Following Krishna's instructions, Arjuna mustered his courage and spoke harshly to his older brother, rebuking him for his role in the disastrous gambling match and using unkind words. But immediately after his harsh words, Arjuna fell at Yudhisthira's feet, seeking forgiveness and soothing his wounded honor.

Yudhisthira, upon realizing the true intentions behind Arjuna's actions, rose from his resting place and embraced his brother, expressing his gratitude for being saved from a calamity. He

acknowledged Krishna as their savior and guide, comparing their journey through the trials and tribulations to navigating treacherous waters with Krishna's lotus feet as their steadfast boat. Yudhisthira's heart filled with relief and appreciation as he recognized the grace that had rescued them from grief and sorrow.

Yudhisthira, now understanding the situation clearly, gave his blessing for Arjuna to proceed with the mission to slay Karna. With renewed determination, Arjuna and Lord Krishna mounted their chariot and charged toward the front line of battle, ready to face Karna and fulfill their destiny. The stage was set for the ultimate clash, where heroes would rise, vows would be tested, and the fate of the war would hang in the balance.

Chapter 47

The Grand Finale of the 17th Day of Battle

Dhritarastra listened intently to Sanjaya's vivid account of the battlefield, his face contorted with a mixture of dread and fascination. The narrative painted a gruesome picture of the ferocity and brutality of the Pandava warriors, particularly Bhima, as he exacted his revenge upon Duhshasana. The sight of Bhima, his mouth stained with blood, and his maniacal laughter sent shivers down the spines of the Kaurava warriors. Some questioned whether Bhima was truly a human or a fearsome rakshasa in disguise.

Karna, the valiant son of Surya, continued to demonstrate his unmatched prowess, singlehandedly battling the Pandava generals. With each encounter, he unleashed deadly arrows and left a trail of devastation in his wake. Satyaki's horses fell victim to Karna's wrath, but not before Satyaki avenged his fallen comrade by slaying Prasena, Karna's own son. The exchange of blows and the clash of weaponry reverberated through the battlefield, as brave warriors fell on both sides.

The Pandava army, reeling under the onslaught of Karna's might, found a glimmer of hope in the arrival of Arjuna. Mounted on his chariot, Arjuna cut through the chaos and destruction like a guiding light. His mere presence infused the Pandava soldiers with renewed vigor and determination. They rallied behind him, finding solace in the fact that their savior had arrived to steer them away from the jaws of defeat.

Meanwhile, Bhima, his rage consuming him, engaged in a fierce duel with Duhshasana, the perpetrator of countless atrocities against the Pandavas. The clash between the two warriors was thunderous, as arrows and darts were exchanged, and Bhima's mighty mace wreaked havoc upon his opponent's defenses. Bhima's anger surged as he remembered Duhshasana's unforgivable acts, particularly the heinous act of dragging Draupadi by her hair. Fuelled by righteous fury, Bhima descended from his chariot and declared his intent to slay Duhshasana, challenging all the Kaurava warriors to intervene if they dared.

Without hesitation, Bhima unleashed his razor-sharp sword, its blade gleaming ominously in the sun. With a swift strike, he severed Duhshasana's arm, the very arm that had dared to violate Draupadi's sanctity. The ground quivered beneath them as Bhima, his eyes blazing, planted his foot on Duhshasana's neck, ready to exact his retribution. The crowd watched in horrified silence as Bhima opened Duhshasana's chest with a single stroke, his sword rending flesh and bone. The sight of Bhima drinking Duhshasana's blood, reveling in the taste of his enemy's life force, was a macabre spectacle that sent waves of terror through the Kaurava ranks.

The battlefield trembled with a mix of horror and awe as Bhima held aloft Duhshasana's severed head, his triumphant proclamation echoing in the air. Some Kaurava warriors faltered, their resolve shaken, while others were driven to flee, unable to bear witness to such gruesome savagery. Whispers of disbelief and fear spread among the Kaurava forces, as they grappled

with the realization that they faced adversaries capable of unparalleled ruthlessness.

In the face of such fierce and relentless opposition, the Kaurava army found themselves standing on the precipice of doom. The resolute determination of the Pandava warriors, coupled with their unyielding unity, seemed to grow stronger with each passing moment. As Sanjaya concluded his account, Dhritarastra was left to ponder the grim reality that his own sons, despite their overwhelming numbers, would face a formidable challenge in the form of the indomitable Pandava warriors led by Arjuna, their divine charioteer Krishna, and the vengeful Bhima, who now reveled in his gruesome triumph.

Bhima's blood-stained visage sent tremors through the hearts of all who beheld him. With his vow fulfilled in the gruesome demise of Duhshasana, he now set his sights on his next target, the sinful Duryodhana. His words, laced with determination and dripping with the taste of his fallen foe's lifeblood, struck fear deep into the core of every warrior present.

Chitrasena, brother to the mighty Karna, sought to escape the wrathful scene, hurling harsh words at Bhima as he fled. But Yudhamanyu, undeterred by the brother's insolence, pursued him with relentless resolve. In a single fluid motion, Yudhamanyu severed Chitrasena's head with a single arrow, leaving him lifeless upon the ground. The sight of his fallen brother stoked the fires of rage within Karna, transforming him into an unstoppable force of destruction. With his bow drawn to its fullest extent, Karna embarked on a merciless rampage, cutting down Pandava troops, horses, and elephants alike.

Sanjaya's account continued, revealing the overwhelming grief that engulfed the Kaurava camp at the loss of their kin. Ten of Dhritarastra's sons, Nishangin, Kavachin, Pasin, Dundahara, Dhanurgraha, Alolupa, Saha, Shanda, Vatavega, and Suvardhasas, united in their fury and charged at Bhima from

their chariots. Yet, Bhima, undaunted, dispatched them swiftly, severing their heads with ten broad-headed shafts. The sight of their decapitated bodies left the Kaurava soldiers in a state of disarray, their courage shattered. Even Karna, witnessing Bhima's relentless might, was stricken with intense fear, prompting Salya to offer him words of reassurance.

However, amidst the chaos, Vrishasena, enraged by the deaths of Duhshasana and Chitrasena, sought revenge upon Nakula, his father's enemy. A fierce clash erupted between the two warriors, with Vrishasena managing to cripple Nakula's horses and rain arrows upon him. Undeterred, Nakula dismounted his chariot, wielding his sword and shield, and proceeded to slay two thousand horsemen. Witnessing Nakula's valor, Arjuna drew near, and Nakula beseeched him to eliminate their common adversary.

Arjuna, with resolve in his voice, turned to Lord Krishna and ordered him to approach Karna's son. He vowed to slay Vrishasena in Karna's very presence, exacting a price for the unjust death of his own son, Abhimanyu. Arjuna's challenge reverberated across the battlefield, aimed not only at Karna but at all the Kaurava kings who dared to shield their fallen comrade. He pledged to end Vrishasena's life and then turn his attention to the wretched Duryodhana, whose malevolent schemes had set the stage for this grand clash.

The arrows of Arjuna flew true, weakening Vrishasena with their relentless assault. Ten shafts struck their mark, severing his bow, his arms, and finally his head adorned with elegant earrings. The life force drained from Vrishasena, his demise a testament to Arjuna's skill and determination. Witnessing the fall of his son, Karna, a tempest of rage and grief, issued a challenge to Arjuna, his eyes fixed upon the imminent battle.

In the face of Karna's charging chariot, Lord Krishna encouraged Arjuna, reminding him of his indomitable prowess and the favor he had earned even from the mighty Shiva himself.

Arjuna, brimming with confidence, affirmed his certainty of victory, assured that the master of the three realms, Krishna, stood by his side. With unwavering determination, he declared that either he would vanquish Karna or meet his own demise on this battlefield. The echoes of their impending clash would resonate through the ages, their names forever intertwined in the annals of glory.

Beholding Vrishasena slain, Karna's eyes burned with a furious rage, and bitter tears stained his cheeks. With unwavering determination, he advanced towards Arjuna, issuing a challenge that resonated across the battlefield. Drums thundered, trumpets blared, and conch shells resounded, heralding Karna's chariot as it moved forward. The Kaurava soldiers erupted in joyous cheers, their voices roaring through the air. On the other side, the Pandava warriors beat their drums and blew their conch shells, encouraging their valiant comrade, the mighty son of Kunti. The clash of weapons ceased as all eyes turned to witness this momentous duel, the culmination of their long-standing animosity. The heavens themselves became a grand theater, filled with celestial beings from various realms. Demigods, sages, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Nagas, Pitris, Apsaras, and Vidyadharas gathered to witness this monumental clash. Surya, the radiant sun god, shone brilliantly, bestowing his silent blessings upon his beloved son, Karna. And even Indra, appearing in the celestial abode, offered fervent prayers for his own son's triumph. The divine spectators took sides, aligning themselves with either Arjuna or Karna, adding their ethereal presence to the momentous occasion. The Lord of the universe himself, Krishna, stood as the charioteer for Arjuna, while Salya, the ruler of Madras, took the reins of Karna's chariot. The two great warriors, their hearts ablaze with the desire for victory, unleashed their formidable weapons upon each other. Onlookers among both armies rallied to support their chosen champion, joining the fray and adding to the chaotic symphony of war. Duryodhana, Kritavarman, Kripa, Shakuni, and Ashvatthama

rallied behind Karna, unleashing their own chosen weapons upon Arjuna. The Kaurava soldiers surged forward, tens of thousands strong, lending their collective might to the fight. As the divine spectators witnessed this clash of titans, they sang praises to Krishna and Arjuna, causing gentle breezes to blow and flowers to rain down from the heavens. The battle commenced with a ferocity unmatched. Arjuna invoked the Agneya weapon, sending forth a fiery assault that scorched Karna's supporting troops. In response, Karna unleashed the Varuna weapon, conjuring dark, dense clouds that showered the battlefield with torrents of rain. Undeterred, Arjuna invoked the Vayavya weapon, summoning powerful winds that dispersed the clouds and restored clarity to the sky. Drawing upon the boon bestowed by Indra, Arjuna unleashed a torrent of arrows from his Gandiva bow, piercing Karna's body from every angle. The furious Karna retaliated, invoking the Bhargava weapon bestowed upon him by Parashurama, the mighty warrior-sage. This divine weapon wrought devastation upon the Panchala and Somaka armies, obliterating thousands in its wake. Encouraged by Krishna and Bhima, Arjuna unleashed the Brahmastra, countering Karna's onslaught. The divine weapon unleashed its wrath, slaying four hundred elephants, eight hundred chariot fighters, one thousand horsemen, and eight thousand foot soldiers. Enraged by Arjuna's resilience, Karna resorted to a desperate measure. He plucked five snakes from his quiver, transforming them into deadly arrows and aimed them at Krishna himself. The serpentine projectiles streaked through the air, piercing the transcendental form of the Lord, but Krishna remained untouched, his divine nature unaffected. Arjuna, incensed by the attack on his charioteer, swiftly severed the snakes into three fragments before they could return to Karna's quiver. Krishna, unharmed and resolute, urged Arjuna to retaliate with equal ferocity. The mighty Pandava warrior, filled with righteous wrath, decimated two thousand chariot fighters who had supported Karna, scattering the other great generals to distant corners of the battlefield. Now, Karna stood alone, facing Arjuna in an epic duel. Their clash intensified, the air resonating

with the clash of their weapons, as they exchanged blows with unwavering resolve. Arjuna shattered Karna's crown, earrings, and armor, stripping away his protective coverings and inflicting severe wounds. Unable to withstand the pain, Karna dropped his bow and sank onto the seat of his chariot. Arjuna, ever mindful of the rules of honorable combat, hesitated to strike down his defenseless opponent. But Krishna, the supreme protector of His devotees, reminded Arjuna of Karna's grievous transgressions. With a commanding voice, Krishna urged the mighty son of Kunti to unleash the final blow and end Karna's life.

Desiring to appease the Lord of the universe, Arjuna notched an iron arrow to his bow, imbued with the power of Indra's thunderbolt. Just as the fateful hour of Karna's demise drew near, Kala, the personification of Time, appeared before him. Kala whispered the approaching end to Karna, informing him, "The earth devours your chariot wheel!" In an instant, Karna found himself unable to recall the mantras that would summon his celestial weapons. The incantation for the Brahmastra, the weapon with which he intended to vanquish Arjuna, slipped from his memory. As Karna's chariot wheel sank into the earth, stubbornly refusing to budge, a sense of destiny's overwhelming power consumed him. A profound sorrow washed over him as he beheld the turn of events. Yet, in that moment of despair, the incantation for the Brahma weapon surged back into his consciousness, and he unleashed it upon Arjuna. Arjuna, however, countered with the Aindra weapon, and the clash between these mighty forces neutralized their devastating impact.

Undeterred, Karna severed Arjuna's bowstring, one after another, until ten strings lay in tatters. Unbeknownst to Karna, Arjuna had reserved a hundred bowstrings for battle. With relentless precision, Karna rained arrows upon every inch of Arjuna's body. Witnessing this onslaught, Lord Krishna spoke resolutely, "Unleash your superior weapons upon Karna without hesitation!" Arjuna then invoked the Raudra weapon, preparing it upon his bow. In the meantime, Karna dismounted from his

chariot, striving to free it from the grip of the earth. However, his efforts proved futile as the wheel remained firmly trapped. Tears streamed down Karna's face as he witnessed Arjuna readying to release his weapon. In a plea, he beseeched, "O Partha, wait a moment while I free my chariot from the earth. Do not slay me like a coward, but uphold the principles of noble warriors. You, the bravest among men, should understand that now is not the opportune time to kill me. Grant me this moment to extricate my chariot, stuck as it is in the earth."

Upon hearing Karna's plea, Lord Krishna interjected, "It is by good fortune, O son of Radha, that you now remember virtue. Was it not you, along with Duhshasana, Duryodhana, and Shakuni, who commanded Draupadi to be brought into the King's assembly with the intention of disrobing her? Where was your virtue then, O sinful individual? When the deceitful Shakuni unfairly defeated Yudhisthira in the game of dice, why did virtue not take root in your mind? When the sinful Duryodhana presented Bhima with a poisoned cake, where was your adherence to righteousness? When the Pandavas were exiled for thirteen years in the forest, where was your virtue then? When Draupadi was dragged into the King's assembly, it was you who proclaimed, 'The Pandavas, O Draupadi, have fallen into the abyss. Choose another husband.' You took delight in that sight. Where was your virtue at that moment? When Abhimanyu was unjustly overwhelmed by six mighty warriors, where were the moral principles that should have guided you? If virtue did not guide your words in those instances, why, all of a sudden, do you demand righteousness now? Today, you shall not escape with your life, O sinful soul. The Pandavas will conquer the Kaurava army and attain everlasting glory. The Pandavas are safeguarded by virtue."

Sanjaya continued, "O King, thus addressed by the lotus-eyed Vasudeva, Karna remained silent, his head bowed in shame. His lips trembled with rage as he once again took up his bow and continued his fierce combat with Arjuna. He unleashed a deadly weapon, endowed with the potency of a thunderbolt, which

struck Partha's chest, causing him to slump onto the floor of his chariot. Seizing this opportunity, Karna endeavored to free his trapped chariot. Despite his arduous struggle, the wheel stubbornly refused to yield. Then, Lord Krishna advised Arjuna, 'Sever your enemy's head before he returns to his chariot.' In accordance with the words of the lotus-eyed Lord, Arjuna swiftly cleaved the standard from Karna's chariot. That banner, which had instilled great inspiration within the Kaurava army, tumbled to the ground, signaling the demise of the illustrious hero. Arjuna then reached into his quiver and retrieved the Anjalika weapon, reminiscent of Indra's thunderbolt. This six-foot-long arrow blazed with a fiery glow, resembling a rod of death. As Arjuna notched the arrow to his bow, the earth quivered, and the sky reverberated with awe-inspiring sounds. Drawing his bowstring taut, Arjuna released the arrow, which soared through the heavens, severing the beautiful head of Surya's son. The formidable Anjalika weapon accomplished its mission, felling the foremost warrior of the earth. As Karna's head plummeted to the ground, a torrent of blood gushed forth from his trunk, carrying with it his life force. That spiritual spark swiftly ascended to the realm of the sun, reuniting with its father.

Overwhelmed by Karna's demise, Lord Krishna and Arjuna resounded their conches, and the Pandava warriors followed suit. The demigods showered flowers upon Arjuna, while their drums and trumpets resounded with jubilation. Apsaras danced, and Gandharvas played their celestial instruments. Warriors exultantly waved their garments and leaped with unbridled joy. The moment of Karna's death arrived in the late afternoon, as he was akin to the sun, and the scorching rays of that sun were his blazing arrows. Now that the Karna sun had set, the army found relief from those searing rays. Following Karna's demise, his chariot was freed from its earthen shackles, and Salya steered it away from the battlefield.

Witnessing Karna's fall, Bhima emitted thunderous roars, striking his armpits in a fearsome display. He danced with wild

abandon, assuming various poses, and his menacing presence sent tremors through the Kaurava army. Duryodhana, consumed by grief, wept, his body drenched in tears. Enraged by the loss of numerous friends and relatives, he rallied twenty-five thousand soldiers and charged at Bhima with the intent to kill. Bhima brandished his mace and launched a relentless assault upon the advancing foe. In a short span of time, all twenty-five thousand soldiers were pulverized by the ferocious blows of Bhimasena. Witnessing the decimation of his troops, Duryodhana, seething with anger, attempted to rally the fleeing army. Yet, Salya pacified him, and thus the forces were withdrawn on the seventeenth day of the cataclysmic battle.

Lord Krishna and Arjuna then hastened to inform King Yudhisthira of Karna's demise. Yudhisthira, overwhelmed with joy, beseeched them to lead him to the location where Karna's lifeless body lay. His long-standing apprehensions had now been quelled, and he embraced both Lord Krishna and Arjuna with profound elation. Thus, the Pandavas reveled in the death of the valiant hero, oblivious to the fact that he was, in truth, their elder brother. Karna, recognizing his younger siblings, had spared their lives, unable to relinquish his deep affection for Duryodhana. And so, he perished alongside his brothers and kinsmen, holding steadfast to his bond of kinship and loyalty.

Chapter 48

The 18th Day of Battle

Dhritarastra, his voice filled with anguish, spoke forth, "Sanjaya, my very sinews writhe in agony upon receiving news of Karna's demise. Who shall provide solace and protection for my valiant son? With Bhishma and Drona fallen, and now Karna laid low on the field of battle, who shall rise as the supreme commander of our mighty army? I implore you, O Suta, to recount in full detail the events that transpired on the eighteenth day of this colossal clash."

Sanjaya, with a somber countenance, responded, "O scion of Bharata, listen attentively as I unravel the tale of bloodshed that unfolded amidst both the Kurus and the Pandavas. Following Karna's fall, a void of leadership gripped the Kaurava ranks. With their protector vanquished by the arm of the mighty Arjuna, the soldiers resembled shattered vessels tossed upon a tempestuous sea. Indeed, in the wake of Karna's demise, the Kaurava warriors resembled hapless deer pursued by a formidable lion. Pierced by Arjuna's unrelenting arrows, the troops scattered in disarray, seeking refuge wherever they could find it. It took great effort on King Duryodhana's part to rally his valiant soldiers and restore some semblance of order. Eventually, they withdrew to their tents to seek respite from the horrors of battle. After a period of rest and rejuvenation, the surviving generals of Duryodhana's army convened and counseled the king, saying, 'Now that the invincible Karna lies fallen on the battlefield, we must select another from our midst to assume the mantle of commander-in-chief of this heroic army.' Turning to

Drona's son, Ashvatthama, Duryodhana inquired, 'O Ashvatthama, you, being a Brahmana of the highest order, possess unparalleled wisdom. Therefore, tell us who should be the supreme leader of our forces.'"

Ashvatthama replied with conviction, "Let Salya, the ruler of Madras, assume command of our army. In fame, lineage, prowess, and achievements, he surpasses all of us. Under his guidance, we shall march forth to conquer the Pandavas and secure victory."

Upon hearing this recommendation, Duryodhana approached Salya and beseeched him, "O ruler of Madras, you have ever been devoted to your allies and have constantly sought our welfare. We implore you to lead this army of brave warriors and subjugate the Pandavas. Amongst us are numerous generals who have exhibited their valor throughout these eighteen days. With their support on all fronts, we shall either triumph or ascend to the celestial realms. Be our shield, as Kartikeya protects the gods."

To this request, Salya responded, "O King of the Kurus, I shall fulfill all that you ask of me. The two Krishnas may be deemed invincible by all, but they do not possess my mastery over weapons. When wrath engulfs me, I can vanquish demons and gods alike. Without a doubt, I shall lead your troops and construct an impenetrable formation that our adversaries shall fail to breach."

Encouraged by King Salya's resolve, Duryodhana appointed the ruler of Madras as the commander-in-chief of the army. The entire army rejoiced, beating their drums and sounding their conch shells. They already envisioned the Pandavas lying defeated on the battlefield. They then retired for the night, awaiting the dawn of the eighteenth day.

With the arrival of the dawn, the assembled troops, filled with a fervent desire for combat, congregated. Their hearts brimmed with determination, prepared to secure victory or ascend to the

realm of divinity. The Kaurava forces outnumbered the Pandavas, which bolstered their confidence in imminent triumph.

Seeking further knowledge, Dhritarastra inquired, "O Sanjaya, after seventeen grueling days on the fields of Kurukshetra, how many Kuru warriors remained standing, ready to engage in battle? And likewise, how many stalwart men stood in support of the Pandavas?"

Sanjaya, his voice laden with sorrow, responded, "O descendant of Kuru, I shall now reveal the number of courageous soldiers left to wage war in the cause of both Pandavas and Kauravas. O monarch, your son's forces still boasted eleven thousand chariots, ten thousand seven hundred elephants, two hundred thousand horsemen, and three million foot soldiers. As for the Pandavas, O King, they had six thousand chariots, six thousand elephants, ten thousand horses, and one million foot soldiers. Thus, on the dawn of the eighteenth day, these two armies stood arrayed against each other, brimming with eagerness for the impending clash."

Sanjaya's account unfolded with the chaos and fury that permeated the battleground. As the two armies clashed, a colossal dust cloud billowed, obscuring the sun. The air resonated with the cacophony of clashing steel, the thunderous hooves of horses, and the trumpeting of elephants. In the midst of this pandemonium, Krishna and Arjuna, their souls ablaze, blew their sacred conch shells, instilling courage in the hearts of their warriors on this climactic day of confrontation.

Partha and Bhima, fueled by a bloodlust unparalleled, commenced a relentless slaughter of enemy troops, their wrath unyielding. The Kaurava forces dwindled swiftly under their unyielding assault, as if none would remain to champion the cause of the Kauravas before the day drew to its close.

Yudhisthira, accompanied by Dhristadyumna and Shikhandi, launched a relentless assault upon Salya, driving forward with unwavering determination. Nakula, in a fierce encounter,

confronted and dispatched Susena and Satyasena, the valiant sons of Karna, severing their heads with a single stroke of his mighty blade.

In the heat of battle, Bhima engaged in a furious clash with Kritavarman, who managed to bring down Bhima's steeds, seeking an advantage. Undeterred, Bhima, abandoning his chariot, grasped his deadly mace and unleashed his wrath upon the King of the Bhojas, shattering his horses, driver, and chariot into oblivion. Kritavarman, recognizing the peril, swiftly dismounted from his wrecked chariot and fled for his life.

Meanwhile, Salya, the indomitable King of Madras, fought relentlessly against Yudhisthira, while simultaneously wreaking havoc among the Panchalas, Somakas, and Shrinjayas. Bhima, determined to halt Salya's advance, seized his mace and demolished the four horses guiding Salya's chariot. However, Salya, unyielding in the face of triumph, hurled a lance that pierced Bhima's chest. Enraged, Bhima tore the lance from his flesh, retaliating by impaling Salya's charioteer, robbing him of life. Witnessing this valorous act, Salya, undeterred, took up his own mighty mace and lunged at Bhima, eager to engage in combat. The two behemoths twirled and danced, seeking the perfect opportunity to strike. They leaped high, moved left and right, their maces colliding with explosive force, igniting showers of sparks and fire. Blow after blow fell upon their limbs, saturating their bodies in a crimson tide. Though Bhima's mace repeatedly found its mark, Salya, resolute as Mount Meru against a thunderbolt, stood unwavering. In their ferocious duel, both warriors succumbed to exhaustion, collapsing upon the blood-soaked earth. At that moment, Kripacharya arrived on the scene, swiftly placing the ruler of Madras upon his chariot and transporting him away from the battlefield. Bhima, rising up in a daze, swaying like a drunken warrior, once again challenged Salya to combat, only to discover that his foe had been spirited away.

Yet, Duryodhana, undeterred by the setbacks, surged forward, supported by a legion of Kaurava warriors, launching a furious assault upon the Pandavas. The heroic Duryodhana encountered Chekitana, the Vrishni prince, and issued a deadly challenge. Consumed by the seething fires of wrath following Karna's demise, Duryodhana hurled a powerful javelin, which found its mark, impaling Chekitana's chest, bringing the mighty scion of the Vrishni lineage crashing down, lifeless.

Once Salya regained his strength, he reentered the fray, his thirst for victory or death unquenchable. He engaged in battle with Bhima, Satyaki, Nakula, and Sahadeva, emerging triumphant over each. Yudhisthira, undeterred, stepped forward to confront Salya. In their clash, Salya sundered Yudhisthira's bow in two and rained arrows upon him, inflicting numerous wounds. Yudhisthira retaliated, severing Salya's bow and piercing him with ten razor-sharp shafts. The firstborn of Kunti then claimed victory over Salya's four horses and the defenders of his chariot's wheels. In response, Ashvatthama appeared on the battlefield, ferrying Salya away upon his chariot, eluding Yudhisthira's pursuit. However, Yudhisthira, unyielding in his determination, challenged Salya anew, relentlessly pursuing him. Salya, ascending another chariot, directed his assault toward Yudhisthira, piercing Bhima with three arrows and Satyaki with ten. Nakula and Sahadeva suffered under a barrage of arrows. Unable to tolerate the enemy's valor, Salya struck down the horses and charioteer of the Pandava King. Seizing this opportunity, Bhima halted Salya's advance by slaying his four horses and eliminating his charioteer. Salya, undeterred, brandished a sword and shield, rushing toward Yudhisthira, thirsting for his blood. Enraged, Bhima shattered the shield and sword with a volley of arrows, eliciting a resounding roar of triumph from the Pandava ranks. Stripped of weapons, Salya charged at Yudhisthira, whose horses had already met their end. Seated resolutely in his chariot, Yudhisthira gripped a golden dart bestowed upon him by Lord Shiva. With unyielding determination, he aimed the dart at Salya's heart and, summoning all his strength, launched it forth. Salya, realizing

the impending danger, attempted to catch the dart, but it pierced through his hands and chest, plunging into the earth, claiming the life force of the valiant King. With arms outstretched, the King of Madras crashed to the ground, akin to a mighty tree felled by a thunderbolt.

In the blistering aftermath of Salya's demise, his younger brother, driven by a thirst for vengeance, pounced upon Yudhisthira, raining down a relentless barrage of arrows. But the righteous Pandava prince, unyielding in his valor, wielded a broad-headed shaft, cleaving through the air and severing the aggressor's head from his body. With this stunning act of retribution, the Kaurava forces trembled and scattered, their hopes of victory shattered like fragile glass.

Duryodhana, the indomitable prince, quickly rallied his retreating troops, urging them to reclaim their lost glory or ascend to the celestial abodes. He charged at Dhristadyumna, piercing his flesh with a multitude of arrows, rendering the King's horses and chariot driver lifeless. Mounting a steed, Duryodhana swiftly departed for another sector of the blood-soaked battlefield, his fiery resolve unbroken.

Meanwhile, a horde of three thousand elephants encircled the valiant Pandava brothers, intent on trampling them into oblivion. The mighty Arjuna, his fury unleashed, surged forward to confront the formidable elephant army. With swift and lethal precision, he decimated the towering beasts, sending them crashing to the ground, their massive bodies sprawled like fallen giants. Bhima, fueled by an inferno of rage, abandoned his chariot, brandishing his fearsome mace with relentless fury. He whirled his weapon like a spinning discus of destruction, shattering the heads of colossal elephants, unleashing a torrent of flesh and blood. The terrified elephants, overwhelmed by fear, involuntarily released their bodily wastes, desperate to escape the wrathful warrior. Yet, none could evade the lightning-fast Bhima, who methodically exterminated each and every one of the three thousand elephants, transforming the Kurukshetra field

into a graveyard of titans. The fallen elephants formed an impenetrable wall, ensnaring the Pandavas within their midst. Bhima, undeterred, used his immense strength to lift and hurl the lifeless behemoths aside, clearing a path of escape for his brothers.

In another corner of the battlefield, Ashvatthama, filled with a frenzied desire to locate Duryodhana, interrogated the warriors around him. Yet, none could reveal the whereabouts of the prince, who had momentarily withdrawn from the turmoil of war to find respite. The Kaurava army teetered on the brink of annihilation, their forces dwindling to mere remnants. Bhima, relentless in his pursuit of victory, encountered a group of Duryodhana's brothers, including Durmarshana, Srutanta, Jaitra, and a host of others. With unwavering determination, Bhima, true to his vow, dispatched each cousin with the ferocity of a lion ravaging a flock of deer. In the wake of their fall, the remnants of the Kaurava army swarmed Bhima, surrounding him and unleashing a storm of weapons upon him. The mighty Pandava, unable to tolerate their assault, retaliated with devastating force, decimating five hundred chariots, seven hundred elephants, eight hundred horsemen, and ten thousand foot soldiers. As the massive phalanx crumbled under Bhima's onslaught, he let out a thunderous roar, striking terror into the hearts of the enemy. With only a handful of warriors remaining, the leaders of Duryodhana's army, fueled by desperation and a lust for the afterlife, charged once more at the Pandavas, their minds set on crossing the threshold to the next world.

Sanjaya's narrative continued, relaying the desperate state of affairs. After Bhimasena had claimed the lives of ninety-eight of your sons, only two remained standing—Duryodhana and Sudarshana. A mere five hundred horsemen, two hundred chariots, one hundred chariot warriors, and three thousand foot soldiers comprised the tattered remnants of the Kaurava army. Determined and united, they launched a final, desperate assault on the Pandavas. Shakuni, the master of deception, and Susharman, the ruler of the Trigartas, confronted the resolute

Arjuna. Sudarshana engaged Bhima in combat, while Duryodhana locked horns with Sahadeva. Duryodhana's lance found its mark, piercing Sahadeva's forehead, rendering him unconscious. But as Sahadeva regained his senses, a fierce fire ignited within him. Arming himself with a powerful, broad-headed arrow, he severed Sudarshana's head, marking the ninety-ninth cousin to meet his end. Now, only Duryodhana remained, the solitary survivor of his kin.

Witnessing his son's life extinguished, Shakuni's eyes welled with tears, his breath heavy with despair. In that moment, his mind drifted to the wisdom imparted by Vidura, who had foretold the ultimate annihilation of the kshatriya lineage. Understanding that his fate was sealed, the Gandhara King unleashed his weapons upon Sahadeva. But Sahadeva, unyielding and untamed, shattered Shakuni's bow, piercing him with a volley of arrows. Each weapon Shakuni released was met with resolute defiance from Sahadeva, until the Gandhara king found himself disarmed and fleeing from the battlefield, seeking solace in his survival.

Sahadeva, relentless in his pursuit, swiftly followed, issuing a defiant challenge to Shakuni, "Recall your duties as a warrior and face your destiny like a true man! You reveled in delight during the fateful game of dice. Now, O wretched soul, taste the bitter fruit of your actions!" With unwavering determination, Sahadeva pierced Shakuni with ten arrows, closing in on him, intent on ending his life. Shakuni, driven to desperation, seized a golden lance, hurtling towards Sahadeva, seeking to extinguish his flame. But before the lance could be unleashed, Sahadeva swiftly severed both of Shakuni's arms. With one razor-sharp arrow, he severed the head of that treacherous figure whose crooked dice had cast the Pandavas into thirteen years of exile. As life ebbed away from Shakuni's body, he realized the full weight of his sins, his last breath carrying the burden of regret.

In this pivotal moment, the tides of the great war continued to turn, as the virtuous Pandavas, driven by righteousness and their

undying quest for justice, fought relentlessly against the dwindling forces of the Kauravas.

Witnessing their revered King lying lifeless on the blood-soaked ground, the remaining Gandhara warriors, consumed by fury and grief, surged forward with a desperate yearning for battle. Emboldened by the memory of their fallen leader, King Duryodhana, the dwindling remnants of the Kaurava army launched a final assault, driven by a fervent desire to transcend to the realm beyond. Yet, in a matter of moments, the valiant Pandavas, exultant in their righteousness, swiftly dispatched the Kaurava soldiers, leaving none alive. The once-mighty army, comprising eleven Akshauhini divisions, was reduced to a mere handful of men—four to be exact. Duryodhana, Ashvatthama, Kritavarman, and Kripacharya stood as the sole survivors amidst the wreckage of their fallen comrades.

Duryodhana, witnessing the devastation and realizing the futility of his cause, made a strategic retreat from the battlefield, his spirit weighed down by the burden of defeat. Meanwhile, the Pandavas, their hearts swelling with triumph, erupted in triumphant roars, their conch shells resonating with the reverberations of their victory. Among the surviving forces on the side of the righteous Pandavas were two thousand chariot warriors, seven hundred elephants, five thousand horsemen, and ten thousand foot soldiers—a testament to their unwavering courage and unwavering resolve.

Sanjaya, ever the faithful narrator, continued his account. As Duryodhana surveyed the desolation surrounding him—the sea of lifeless bodies and the echoes of his shattered dreams—he resolved to seek respite and regroup before facing the Pandavas once more. Turning eastward, he chanced upon a tranquil lake, its waters shimmering in the fading light. Weary and wounded, the fallen prince sought solace in its embrace. Drawing upon his mystical powers, he commanded the lake to solidify, creating a

makeshift refuge. There, amidst the frigid waters, Duryodhana laid, his lifeblood seeping into the lake's depths, his mind burdened by the echoes of Vidura's prophetic words, which had long foretold this harrowing annihilation.

As the final act of the great war loomed on the horizon, the curtain drew closer to its inevitable descent, leaving Duryodhana, the embattled prince, to confront his destiny alone, enveloped in the icy grip of the lake that bore witness to his defeat.

Chapter 49

Duryodhana in Hiding

Duryodhana, having sought refuge in the depths of the lake through his mystic powers, found temporary respite from the tumultuous events unfolding around him. However, fate had different plans in store for him. As the Pandavas scoured the battlefield in search of any remnants of the Kaurava army, three notable figures—Kripa, Kritavarman, and Ashvatthama—hastily mounted their chariots and approached the lake where Duryodhana lay hidden. Their intention was to inform the guards and the grief-stricken ladies of the Kaurava camp about the annihilation that had befallen their loved ones.

Upon hearing the heart-wrenching news, the Kaurava women, overcome with sorrow, collapsed to the ground, lamenting their loss and calling out for their husbands. The elder men within the camp, understanding the gravity of the situation, began preparations to escort the grieving women back to the city of Hastinapura.

In the midst of this somber scene, Yuyutsu, your sole surviving son who had chosen to side with the Pandavas, approached Yudhisthira, the righteous leader of the victorious side. He humbly requested permission to return to the city and offer solace to the bereaved relatives left behind. Yudhisthira, displaying his noble character, warmly embraced Yuyutsu and granted him the permission he sought. Your son, born of your Vaishya wife, then departed for the Kaurava camp, where he arranged for the women to be taken back to Hastinapura, their hearts burdened with grief.

Curious about the fate of Kritavarman, Kripa, and Ashvatthama, as well as the destiny that awaited his own son, Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra turned to Sanjaya for further enlightenment. In response, Sanjaya revealed that after the Kaurava camp had been abandoned, the three warriors—Kritavarman, Kripa, and Ashvatthama—caught wind of the victorious sounds resonating from the Pandava side. Fearing that the Pandavas were advancing towards their location to engage in yet another battle, the trio chose to flee from the scene.

The Pandavas, on the other hand, relentlessly searched the entire expanse of the battlefield, their determination unwavering. However, their horses weary and their forces in need of rest, they returned to their own camp to recuperate briefly. It was during this interval that Kritavarman, Kripa, and Ashvatthama arrived at the lake where Duryodhana sought refuge. Engaging in conversation with their fallen king, they urged him to rise and join them in a final confrontation against Yudhisthira, promising either victory or a glorious ascent to the next world. They believed that the Pandava forces, though diminished and ravaged by the preceding battles, would be no match for Duryodhana's indomitable prowess.

Duryodhana, responding to his comrades' entreaties, expressed his elation at hearing their voices and confirmed his intentions. He acknowledged his fatigue and the wounds he had sustained, deeming it necessary to rest before rejoining the battle.

Duryodhana assured his companions that he would rise anew on the following day, fully prepared to confront the enemy and reclaim his kingdom. His resolve remained unshaken, his determination unyielding.

Unbeknownst to Duryodhana and his confidants, their conversation had been overheard by a group of hunters sympathetic to the Pandavas. Driven by a desire to please the righteous side, these hunters swiftly made their way to the Pandava camp, sharing with them the invaluable information they had gathered. The Pandavas, plagued by anxiety due to their inability to locate Duryodhana, found renewed hope in this timely revelation. Determined to confront their foe, they set forth towards the lake where Duryodhana concealed himself.

Accompanying the Pandavas were a host of formidable warriors: Satyaki, Dhristadyumna, Shikhandi, Uttamaujas, Yudhamanyu, and the five sons of Draupadi. Additionally, survivors from the Somaka, Shrinjaya, and Panchala divisions joined their ranks. As the Pandavas and their allies approached the lake, Ashvatthama, Kripa, and Kritavarman bid farewell to Duryodhana and hastily retreated, fearing the imminent specter of death.

As the scene unfolded, the Pandavas beheld the hardened waters of the lake, evidence of Duryodhana's mystical influence, and glimpsed the fallen king lying beneath its surface. Filled with determination, Yudhisthira, the righteous and wise leader, approached Lord Krishna and spoke, expressing his awareness of Duryodhana's attempt to conceal himself through mystic powers. Lord Krishna, the embodiment of divine wisdom, instructed Yudhisthira to dispel the illusion created by Duryodhana through his own mystical abilities. He encouraged Yudhisthira to employ the powers at his disposal, affirming that those who wielded such mystic powers must be countered with the same.

Thus inspired by Lord Krishna's guidance, Yudhisthira, the epitome of righteousness, proceeded to the lake's edge and issued a challenge to Duryodhana. He questioned the Kaurava prince's motives for retreating into the lake after being responsible for the annihilation of the world's warriors. Yudhisthira reminded Duryodhana of his renowned reputation as a heroic warrior in royal assemblies and implored him to rise and fight, emphasizing that he was born into a noble lineage of Kshatriyas. Yudhisthira presented two stark possibilities to Duryodhana: either he would emerge victorious and conquer the world, or he would be vanquished by the Pandavas and ascend to the heavenly realms.

The stage was set for the final confrontation, with the Pandavas and their allies standing resolute, awaiting Duryodhana's response. The outcome of the great war hung in the balance as destiny poised to unravel its final act.

Duryodhana, his voice dripping with defiance, retorted, "No surprise, O King, that fear grips the hearts of all beings. But know this, I, Duryodhana, have never once turned tail on the battlefield, cowering from my foes. Even when my chariot was reduced to splinters and not a comrade stood by my side, I sought only respite from the weariness of war. This plunge into these waters is not borne of fear or sorrow, but of the exhaustion that plagues a warrior after a day's grueling strife. If you and your followers seek rest, then I shall rest as well. And when the weariness dissipates, I shall rise from these depths and plunge back into combat."

Yudhisthira's voice carried a steely resolve as he replied, "We have all rested enough. We have searched for you tirelessly, for hours on end, as the remnants of your army were decimated. Arise now, and face us in battle."

Upon hearing Yudhisthira's challenge, Duryodhana shot back, "Those for whom I coveted dominion now lie lifeless, strewn

across the battlefield. I no longer desire to rule over a world devoid of friends and kin. What pleasure is there in a kingdom bereft of loved ones? I relinquish the kingship of this realm and offer it to you as a gift. As for me, I shall retreat to the forest and embrace the life of a renunciate. I have no yearning to partake in the pleasures of life itself."

The sagacious Yudhisthira responded with scornful words to Duryodhana's cowardly pleas, "Utter not such hollow words, O Duryodhana, for I hold no compassion for you. You may offer this earth as a gift, but I refuse to accept any boon bestowed by your treacherous hands. It is not the duty of a king to accept gifts. Nevertheless, I shall seize this earth and rule it, after I have vanquished you in battle. How dare you proffer this earth as a gift when you have no dominion over it! In the past, you refused to grant me even a sliver of land to plant a needle. Yet now, in this hour, you extend the entire world to me? What fool would bestow the whole earth upon his enemies? Though you yearn for dominion, you shall not escape with your life today! In the past, you endeavored to poison us, burn us, drown us, and unleash untold cruelties upon our queen. You exiled us and lashed out with vile words. For these abominations, O wicked soul, you must meet your demise."

Sanjaya continued the narrative, "Thus chastised, O monarch, your son's breath became labored, reminiscent of a venomous serpent. A ferocious determination consumed him as he readied himself for battle, mace gripped firmly in his hand. His limbs bled from numerous wounds, his body drenched in water. Addressing Yudhisthira, he declared, 'If you insist, then let us fight one on one. It is unseemly for a lone warrior to face a multitude of adversaries, especially when I lack armor, chariot, and adequate weaponry. Let the celestial gods bear witness to this plea—a single combat between equals.'"

Yudhisthira retorted, his voice dripping with scorn, "How convenient that you remember the importance of righteousness now, when it was absent from your mind during Abhimanyu's

fateful encounter. If it is true that one warrior should not be felled by many, then explain how you, along with your cohort of sinners, slew Abhimanyu when he stood defenseless, on foot, without armor, weapons, or chariot? We offer you armor and all else you require for battle. Moreover, I bestow upon you the boon that if you manage to slay any one of us, then you may reclaim your kingdom. But if we vanquish you, you shall journey to the other world."

Sanjaya's narrative continued, "Upon hearing Yudhisthira's offered benedictions, Duryodhana's spirits were buoyed. Addressing his cousin, he exclaimed, 'I am prepared to fight you or any of your brothers with the mace as my weapon. I will face any one of you and emerge victorious. None among you possesses the skill with the mace that I do. I do not wish to boast, but I shall let my actions speak for themselves. Let us discard chariots and engage on foot, wielding only the mace. With your permission, I shall crush you and your brothers beneath my blows.'"

Yudhisthira's voice rang out, unwavering in its conviction, "Arise, O son of Gandhari, and face me in combat. Encounter us one at a time, with utmost care. Today, you shall meet your end, sprawled upon the ground, beneath the weight of my mace."

As Yudhisthira's challenge reverberated, Duryodhana, unable to tolerate it any longer, emerged from the water, mace clutched tightly in his hand. His body bore the marks of many wounds, his entire being drenched in water. Turning to Yudhisthira, he spoke, "You demand single combat, and so be it. It is not fitting for a warrior to engage in battle against a multitude. But I must confess, among the countless brave warriors present here, I stand without proper weapons, a chariot, or even sufficient arms. Will you not fight me one by one? Know this, I fear neither you, nor Vrikodara, Phalguna, Vasudeva, nor any other warrior here. Today, I shall confront all of you, freeing myself from the debts I owe my kin and allies."

Yudhisthira, in response, asserted, "You have evoked the spirit of a valiant warrior's duty, O Duryodhana. You may battle any one of us, employing the weapon of your choosing. I also grant you the boon that should you slay any one of us, you shall ascend to the throne."

Upon hearing the offer of battle, Duryodhana replied, a smugness creeping into his voice, "Your confidence in these warriors is evident, since you insist on one-on-one combat. I select the mace as my weapon of choice. There have been many glorious chariot duels, but today, let both sides contend on foot, wielding only the mace. With your permission, I shall shatter you and your brothers upon this very battlefield."

"Rise, O son of Gandhari, and face me," Yudhisthira declared resolutely. "Stand against us one by one, with utmost care. Today, you shall meet your demise, and we shall witness you crushed into the earth by this very mace."

As Duryodhana heard Yudhisthira's challenge, his tolerance crumbled. Pierced by the words, the mighty warrior emerged from the water, his roar reverberating through the air. Bloodied and wounded, his body glistening with water, he stood before Yudhisthira. Turning to his cousin, he spoke, "I am ready to fight you or any of your brothers, armed with my mace. I shall face any one of you and emerge victorious in battle. There is none among you who can match my prowess with the mace. I do not seek to boast, but I shall make these words a reality before your very eyes. Let any one of you take up the mace and face me alone!"

Amidst Duryodhana's incessant roars, lotus-eyed Lord Vasudeva, Krishna, interjected, "O Yudhisthira, you have acted hastily. For thirteen long years, this sinful man has honed his skills on an iron statue of Bhima, knowing well that this battle would come to pass. It seems you have brought forth yet another game of chance, reminiscent of the one you played with Shakuni. Bhima possesses strength, while Duryodhana boasts skill. In this

confrontation, skill shall triumph. Indeed, the sons of Kunti and Pandu are not destined to revel in sovereignty. They are fated to endure a life of perpetual exile."

To Krishna's words, Bhima spoke, determination ringing in his voice, "O Madhu-slayer, fret not over the outcome of this battle. Rest assured, I shall slay Duryodhana. We have already weathered countless adversities, and by Your grace, my Lord, we have emerged triumphant. With Your auspicious presence, Yudhisthira's victory is assured. O Janardana, let all the warriors bear witness as I duel this wicked soul, fulfilling the vow I made in the assembly."

Having received Lord Krishna's blessings, Bhima addressed Yudhisthira, "Today, O King, I shall take immense pleasure in slaying Duryodhana. Today, I shall unleash the fury that has been pent up within me for thirteen long years of exile. O Yudhisthira, behold as this vile wretch lies sprawled upon the ground, crushed by my mace. At the day's end, I shall adorn you with the victorious wreath."

Brandishing his mace and readying himself for battle, Bhima reminded Duryodhana, "Do you recall the poison you once administered to me? Do you remember Varanavata? Do you recall your mistreatment of Draupadi, or how you unjustly defeated King Yudhisthira in a game of dice? Today, you shall witness the consequences of your heinous acts. It is because of you that our grandfather lies upon a bed of arrows. Because of you, Drona, Karna, Salya, Shakuni, and all your brothers have met their end. You alone remain among the living. Today, I shall slay you with my mace, and there is no doubt about it."

Chapter 50

The Final Conflict

The battlefield was ablaze with the clash of mighty warriors, their muscles bulging and sweat pouring down their faces. Lord Balarama, the formidable figure known for his prowess, had appeared on the scene, his mere presence commanding respect. But the bitter rivals, Bhima and Duryodhana, were blind to his wise counsel, their minds consumed by a burning hatred for each other.

Lord Balarama's voice boomed with authority as he spoke, "My dear King Duryodhana and Bhimasena, I know both of you are renowned fighters, champions of the world. But hear me out, for I have insight. Bhima, with his unmatched strength, and Duryodhana, the club-wielding master. You are equals in your own right, and neither can claim superiority over the other. Cease this pointless battle, I implore you!"

But their hearts were tainted with animosity, and the pleas of the mighty lord fell on deaf ears. Their minds echoed with past insults and grievances, fueling their desire for vengeance. They were consumed by madness, their focus solely on the annihilation of their nemesis. Lord Balarama, perceiving the

fateful path they had chosen, turned away, his duty done, and departed for the city of Dvaraka.

As the divine presence faded, the two warriors locked eyes, their thirst for combat unquenchable. They moved with agility and precision, seeking any advantage that would grant them victory. Bhima circled his foe, attacking and retreating, his blows fierce and unrelenting. Duryodhana countered, a whirlwind of strikes and defenses, refusing to yield an inch.

Blood spilled from their wounds, mingling with the dust of the battlefield. Each blow resonated with bone-crushing force, shaking the earth beneath their feet. Duryodhana struck Bhima's side, yet the Pandava remained unyielding, steadfast as the mighty Mount Meru. In retaliation, Bhima shattered Duryodhana's mace, reducing it to naught but fragments.

The clash of their weapons created a cataclysmic spectacle, a storm of smoke and sparks that enveloped the battleground. The onlookers stood in awe, the ground trembling beneath their feet. But Duryodhana, refusing to accept defeat, retrieved his shattered mace and charged at Bhima with renewed fury, his every swing a desperate attempt to crush his foe.

Yet Bhima stood firm, an immovable titan, no pain coursing through his veins. The crowd erupted in applause, marveling at his indomitable strength. Bhima retaliated, striking Duryodhana's side with a punishing blow, sending him crashing to his knees. The air reverberated with a thunderous cheer from the kings and princes witnessing the spectacle.

Duryodhana, unwilling to accept defeat, mustered his remaining strength and struck Bhima's forehead with a vengeful blow. But Bhima, unyielding, stood resolute, not an inch of ground surrendered. With his own mace, he delivered a devastating blow to Duryodhana, sending him sprawling to the ground. The Kaurava prince, regaining consciousness, rose once more, determined to defeat Bhima, employing every skill and strategy at his disposal.

And so, the battle raged on, their clash echoing through the ages, two titans locked in a struggle for supremacy, neither relenting in their pursuit of victory. The fate of Kurukshetra hung in the balance as the world watched, captivated by the raw power and unyielding determination of these mighty warriors.

"Bhima is stronger, there is no doubt," Krishna declared. "But Duryodhana possesses cunning skill. If it were a fair fight, victory would not be easily attained by Bhima. However, remember the gambling match? Bhima vowed to break Duryodhana's thighs for his heinous act against Draupadi. It is time for that vow to be fulfilled, to bring an end to this treacherous saga."

With these words, Krishna slapped his thighs in plain view of Bhima, who understood the divine message. The two mighty warriors clashed, their roars blending with the thirst for triumph. Seizing an opportunity, Duryodhana lunged at Vrikodara, his mace raised high. Yet Bhima, unfazed, hurled his own mace with tremendous force. Duryodhana evaded the projectile, seizing the chance to strike Bhima, causing torrents of blood to flow from the Pandava's side. Unbeknownst to Duryodhana, Bhima's strength waned, but his determination remained unyielding.

After a brief respite, Bhima rose again, gripping his mace tightly, his gaze fixed on Duryodhana. The Kaurava prince executed a maneuver called Avasthana, leaping into the air to evade Bhima's attack. But Bhima, attuned to his foe's every move, unleashed a thunderous roar, summoning all his might, and shattered Duryodhana's deceitful cousin's thighs.

Sanjaya continued his account, relaying the events to the enraptured listeners. Duryodhana, brought down like a felled tree, plummeted to the ground. In that moment, the demigods showered flowers from the heavens, while Gandharvas and Vidyadharas danced and played their melodious instruments. The Pandavas, the Somakas, the Panchalas, and the Shrinjayas

erupted in jubilation, applauding the indomitable prowess of Bhimasena.

With unwavering determination, Bhima approached the fallen Duryodhana, his voice dripping with scorn. "You, the embodiment of sin, who laughed at Draupadi's anguish, who taunted us with 'Cow! Cow!' Now you shall face the consequences of your vile deeds." Bhima delivered a resounding kick to Duryodhana's head, an act of retribution, and placed his foot on the source of their long-standing enmity. After thirteen years of exile, Bhima found satisfaction in his heart.

Yudhisthira, the righteous king, intervened, urging Bhima to show mercy. "Cease, Bhima. Do not crush his head beneath your foot. Despite his transgressions, he is a king, and now, in this state, he deserves our pity. His warriors, his brothers, his friends, his uncles—everyone dear to him has fallen in battle. Do not insult him further."

As Yudhisthira's words resonated, Bhima halted his vengeful assault. The dying Duryodhana, son of Gandhari, received Yudhisthira's words, acknowledging the consequences of his actions. The king consoled him, "Do not lament your impending demise. It is the result of your own misdeeds. Your sinful activities have led to the destruction of your friends and relatives. This is destiny's design."

The Pandavas, accompanied by Lord Krishna and their faithful followers, ascended their chariots, triumphantly leaving behind the defeated Kaurava camp. They inspected the remnants of Duryodhana's domain, a symbolic act of victory. Lord Krishna, ever the protector of the Pandavas, instructed Arjuna to disarm, a gesture of wisdom and humility. As Arjuna complied, the divine Hanuman, who had adorned their standard, vanished from sight. Then, as if ignited by the celestial weapons of Bhishma, Drona, and Karna, the chariot burst into flames, reducing the entire structure, including the horses, to smoldering ashes.

Witnessing this awe-inspiring event, Arjuna turned to Lord Krishna, seeking answers for the chariot's fiery fate. "O master of the universe, why has this chariot been reduced to ashes?" he inquired, his voice tinged with curiosity.

Krishna, the embodiment of infinite power, responded with profound insight. "This chariot should have been reduced to ashes long ago," he revealed. "It was only due to my presence that it remained intact. Now, after our victory, it reacts to the force of those formidable weapons."

The Pandavas marveled at the unfathomable powers of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, unable to comprehend the extent of His divine influence. Through the influence of Yogamaya, the mystical potency of the Lord, the Pandavas had accepted Krishna as their friend and protector. Thus, accompanied by their beloved well-wisher and the mighty Satyaki, they departed the battlefield, spending the victorious night on the sacred banks of the Oghavati River. The course of destiny had brought them together, forging an unbreakable bond between the Pandavas and the divine. As for the rest of the warriors, guided by their own fates, they returned to their respective tents, their souls forever marked by the cataclysmic events of that fateful day.

Final Thoughts

I sincerely hope that you've found delight in our voyage through the tumultuous battle of Kurukshetra. And I genuinely wish that you've gleaned new knowledge and expanded the boundaries of your consciousness.

Too often, individuals skim through the Bhagavad Gita, hastily passing over the names of heroes or dismissing the initial chapters as mere philosophical discourse. Such a grave error, I must say.

Another fallacy lingers, one that deems the Bhagavad Gita as the sole treasure within the vast expanse of the Mahabharata. This, my friends, reveals the narrow-mindedness of those who hold such beliefs.

Truth, my dear seekers, transcends mere mental constructs. It must be experienced, felt deep within the core of our being. Krishna, indeed, is real—a person, with likes and dislikes, emotions and desires. Yet, try as we might, we cannot conjure a complete image of Krishna, just as we cannot fully grasp the essence of any individual. They simply are who they are. Our sole means of knowing Krishna lies in the sacred scriptures, the realizations of enlightened masters and holy beings, and through direct experience.

Madhvacarya, in his commentary on the Mahabharata, elucidates that this epic provides a unique opportunity to witness Krishna in His true form, to glimpse His interactions with His devoted companions. No matter how vivid our imagination of Krishna may be, it can never satiate our longing for an imaginary figure. However, through the grace of Vyas, we can have a direct vision of Krishna within the folds of the Mahabharata.

By immersing ourselves in the Mahabharata, we can witness Krishna's divine interplay with His beloved associates. We can catch a glimpse of His true nature, His actions, and in turn, it sets a profound example of what our relationship with Him can be.

Let us embrace the humility to recognize that our connections with Krishna will manifest in diverse and unique ways. Krishna, in His infinite glory, encompasses and relishes all rasas, all flavors of devotion. It is erroneous to assume that our experiences will mirror one another's. Alas, I find myself oft confronted by HOLKys (Hippies who adore Krishna), who decry these Kurukshetra tales as distasteful, incorrect, or unsightly. Yet, my friends, this stems from their personal taste, not from any factual grounds or connection to Krishna. Once again, let us remember, Krishna is beyond our imaginations.

It is of utmost significance to delve into the Shastras, guided by enlightened masters. Please understand, I do not boast, but I must emphasize that there are those who advise me to first immerse myself in the works of Prabupada before delving into the Mahabharata. Yet, I have read them all—Mahabharata, Ramayana, Rig Veda, numerous books by Madhvacarya, the Brahmasutra commentary of Valadev Vidyabushana, and around eighteen Puranas. All this, while leading a fulfilling life, finding time to read and engage in tapa and japa. So, I beseech you, read some books. Do not assume that others share the same shortfall in their appetite for knowledge.

Why do I possess this thirst for knowledge? It is because of the reasons mentioned above. I know that through reading, I can partake in direct communion with the divine. It is a truly wondrous experience. However, I caution against randomly picking up any book without proper siddhanta. You see, one must first grasp the underlying philosophy, allowing the mind to be clear and discerning. Only then can we navigate through any book, any translation, without harboring doubts. For this, we

must study and comprehend the philosophy expounded by the great Acharyas.

Impersonalism seeks to disregard these truths, often claiming that the Gita is merely a philosophical treatise interwoven within a mundane narrative. Krishna becomes a mere philosophical or symbolic construct, an intellectual puzzle to be deciphered, devoid of His personality, His divine essence, and the context of His pastimes.

There exist two paths, both of which lead to great misunderstanding. On one side, we find pure rationalism, and on the other, pure emotionalism. Prabupada astutely stated, "Religion without philosophy is sentimentalism, and philosophy without religion is mental speculation." It is imperative that we blend Bhakti and Vedanta harmoniously in order to make genuine progress. Alas, sentimentality and mental speculation run amok, leading to countless complications. The root cause of our collective problems lies in a lack of education. We possess the most profound and wondrous literature known to humanity, yet people rarely delve into its depths or strive to comprehend its wisdom. Temples have been reduced to mere social occasions, and temple life has become an arena for mutual admiration. I implore you, if you possess ears to listen and eyes to see, delve deep into this ocean of nectar. Who knows what treasures you may discover therein.

I am no Guru, Mahajan, or Maharaj. I have no followers, grand temples, or vast sums of wealth. I am not blessed with a melodious voice, and most people consider me akin to an ogre in appearance. In this age, the common masses value only wealth, fame, and beauty. Hence, I do not expect people to heed my words. However, I do offer a simple solution—the only true problem we face as a collective is a lack of education. We possess the most profound and wonderful literature in the world, yet people seldom read it or make an effort to understand it. Temples have become mere social gatherings, and temple life has devolved into mutual admiration clubs. If you possess the

capacity to hear and the vision to see, I beseech you, dive deep into this vast ocean of divine wisdom. Perhaps you shall uncover something extraordinary.

Blessing of Auspiciousness

Aum praataragniṃ praatarindraṃ havaamahe praatarmitraa varuṇaa praatarashvinaa |
praatarbhagaṃ pooṣhaṇaṃ brahmaṇaspatiṃ praatass somamuta rudraṃ huvem ||1||

1. At dawn, we invoke Agni (the fire deity), Indra (the rain deity), Mitrā (the Sun) and Varuṇa (the deity of the ocean); the Aśvins (the celestial physician twins), Bhaga (the deity of wealth), Puṣan (the Sun as the deity of nutrition), Bṛahmaṇaspati (the preceptor of the gods), Soma (the Moon), and Rudra (the god of dissolution)

Praatarjitaṃ bhagmugraṃ huvem vayaṃ putramaditeryo vidhartaa |
aadhrash chidyaṃ manya maanastu rashchidraajaa chid yaṃ bhagaṃ bhakṣhityaaha ||2||

2. We invoke at dawn, the fierce Bhaga, the son (manifestation) of Aditi (the Cosmic Power), who is the very sustainer of the creation. Whether a pauper, a busy person, or a king; everyone worships and contemplates upon Bhaga saying, 'I would worship Bhaga.'

bhagha praṇetarbhaga satyaraadho bhaghemaaṃ dhiyamudava dadannaḥ |
bhaga praṇo janaya gobhirashvairbhaga pranṛibhirnṛivantassyaam ||3||

3. O Bhaga! The great leader, and truth is your wealth. Bestow it upon us, and elevate our intellect and protect it. Bless us with cattle-wealth, horses, and descendants and followers.

utedaaneeṃ bhagavantasyaamot prapitv ut madhye ahnaam |
utoditaa maghavan sooryasya vayaṃ devaanaaṃ sumatau syaam ||4||

4. May we be blessed by Bhaga now (during this fire-ritual), and when the light approaches, or at midday. O Lord Indra! At sunset also, may we still find favor of the Sun, and other gods.

bhaga eva bhagavaanastu devaastena vayaṃ bhagvantasyaam |
taṃ tvaa bhaga sarva ijjohaveemi sano bhaga pur etaa bhaveha ||5||

5. May Bhaga, (and) the gods be the possessor of good fortune, and through Him, may we may be blessed with good fortune by that god. Everyone including myself invite you to bring in good fortune. O Bhaga! Kindly lead us being present in the ritual.

samadhvaraayoshaso namanta dadhikraaveva shuchaye padaaya |
arvaacheenaṃ vasuvidaṃ bhaganno rathamivaaśhvaa vaajina aavahantu ||6||

6. May the presiding deities of the early morning-hour arrive here, like the horse that puts its foot in the place of Vedic ritual for establishing the fire altar. May they bring Bhaga, the Lord of wealth, as speedily as swift horses pulling a chariot

ashhvaavateergomateerna uṣhaaso veeravateess
sadamuchchantu bhadraḥ |
ghṛitaṃ duhanaa vishvataḥ prapeenaa yūyaṃ paata
swastibhissadaa naha||7||

7. May the presiding deities of the Dawn bless us with many horses and cattle, and plenty of milk and milk-products. May these auspicious gods bless us with good progeny, and nourish all life. May they proclaim auspiciousness in the place of worship. May they always ensure our good fortune